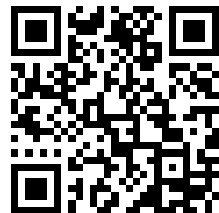

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THE 2/^{1ST} LONDON
FIELD AMBULANCE



THE 2/1st LONDON FIELD AMBULANCE.

1914—1919.



LIEUT.-COLONEL C. S. BREBNER, D.S.O.

Chase, H.L.

THE 2/1ST LONDON FIELD AMBULANCE

*An Outline of the 4½ years Service of
a Unit of the 56th Division at home &
abroad during the Great War.*



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FOREWORD

BY

Lieut.-Colonel C. S. Brebner, D.S.O.

IT will be remembered by many of the members of the Unit that, even before the end of the War, some of us talked of having a history of the Unit written. After demobilisation, with all ranks scattered to various parts, interest appeared to diminish and we probably felt that it was better to forget the War and everything connected with it.

Recently there was published a history of the 56th Division, but this naturally deals with the fighting forces of the division, while the non-fighting units, including the R.A.M.C., are barely mentioned. After reading this history the old idea of having a permanent record of our own was revived and now at last it is accomplished.

Our thanks are due to H. L. Chase for the interesting story he has put before us ; if he has dwelt more on the lighter side of our doings and said less than he might have done of the strenuous duties which had to be performed no one will be inclined to criticise.

The maps have been drawn by T. O. Thirtle and speak for themselves. We must congratulate him on their excellence and thank him for giving us something which will take our memories back to many places and their inhabitants.

The sketches which adorn the pages have been done by E. L. Wratten and T. O. Thirtle and they add greatly to the value of the book.

October, 1923.

C. S. BREBNER.

Introduction

THIS somewhat belated account of the doings of the 2/1st London Field Ambulance calls, perhaps, for a few words of explanation. Had the first intention, which prompted the formation soon after the signing of the Armistice of a "unit history" committee, been carried out, this record would presumably have appeared in 1919. Unfortunately, though the spirit was willing, the flesh was most woefully weak, and the original project failed to pass the intention stage.

Since then, memories have faded, diaries have in some cases "gone West," and some, at any rate, of the intending collaborators have departed leaving no address! The design of the book has consequently required considerable modification. In its present form it does not and obviously could not pretend to be more than an outline sketch of the principal events which occurred and of some of the places visited and of the incidents connected therewith, with a few personal reminiscences inserted here and there, prior to and during the ambulance's three years' "wandering in the wilderness." While, however, much has been omitted, it is hoped that what is here set down does not contain any very flagrant errors—forgiveness is asked for any that may have inadvertently crept in.

If the stretcher bearers should seem to have received more generous treatment than the nursing section, the concert party than the cooks or the sanitary squad than the orderly room staff, the lack of proportion is involuntary and in no sense implies a recognition of the greater value of the services of the one than of the other. Each unit in the army may be said to have resembled a machine consisting of various parts all of which were essential to the machine's smooth working and none of which could have been dispensed with. This little book, with all its omissions and imperfections, will have accomplished its main purpose if it serves as a reminder of the fact that one

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particular machine never stopped running through the failure of any of its parts.

To speak of those years in France as the "good old days"—and they are often so referred to—is surely allowing romance to outdo reality and is attributing to war a glamour which those who saw it face to face know that it did not then and never can possess. They were not the good but the bad old days, but when that is said it remains true that it is all to the good for those who served in the "2/1st" to remember that life, which would otherwise surely have been unbearable, was made possible by the spirit of comradeship and the desire and determination to see it through together which existed among all ranks of the unit and which made it—if not unequalled in the army—that would perhaps be too extravagant a claim—yet certainly second to none both in purpose and performance.

The Unit in England

SEPTEMBER, 1914, witnessed the departure of the first territorial units for service abroad, and among the earliest to go was the 1st London Field Ambulance, whose destination was Malta. With their departure the 2/1st London Field Ambulance came into existence with Major Brebner as the Commanding Officer and a residue of non-commissioned officers and men from the "1/1st" to form the nucleus of the "reserve line."

Those early days at Burton's Court, CHELSEA, were memorable if in the main uneventful. Knowledge of army ways was not extensive and it took time to transform a body of men who were nearly all raw recruits into a well-disciplined and workmanlike unit. Very few men had complete uniforms, and the hybrid effects caused by khaki nether garments and civilian coats and caps, or vice-versâ, gave rise—not unnaturally—to amusement not unmixed with a certain amount of gentle banter at the expense of the new soldiers! But the great machine, of which this unit formed a part, continued to evolve more and more smoothly and efficiently, and at Burton's Court, in Richmond Park and elsewhere we soon began to master the drills, physical "jerks" and other mysteries of the recruit's life.

On December 27th we said good-bye to Chelsea and home life (for during those early days most of the unit had been allowed to return each night to their own homes to sleep) and set out on the next stage of our journey. The objective was CROWBOROUGH, and here the unit was destined to remain for a period of five months. Those were good days, and many of the older members of the unit looked back later on Crowborough as the scene of trials mingled with triumphs which were unique in "2/1st" history. The mud, the huts we lived in, and the keen competition among the three sections for the honour of keeping those palatial residences smart and clean, the early morning sprints, the sing-songs, our performance of "The Mikado" (who will ever forget Dicky Cowen as Pooh

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Bah?), the official and unofficial trips to London, and a score of other memories of those days come back to mind, and most of them are very pleasant memories which those who shared them will never wish to forget.

But Crowborough was not to keep us for long and in May, 1915, we were off again, this time to BURY ST. EDMUNDS, the old Suffolk cathedral town. With summer approaching and civilian billets, life was less Spartan than it had been, and time could be found for social pursuits, tennis parties, girls and suchlike pleasantries!

Bury witnessed considerable changes in the unit's personnel. In July, some 60 men departed on "home service." (Many of these eventually saw service abroad with this or other units). Their places were taken by entirely new recruits enlisted in London. Great was the wrath of the more adventurous of the older members, who saw all prospects of early foreign service fading into the far distance. But old and new quickly blended and it was not long before the unit once again became a homogeneous whole.

In August we left Bury and, resting one night at STOWMARKET, marched to IPSWICH, where we remained until we went to France. That was rather a terrible march and provided a foretaste of the disadvantages of moving from place to place with all one's worldly belongings on one's back, an experience which was shortly to become an all too frequent occurrence.

On arrival in Ipswich we were again favoured with civilian billets, situated in and about the Woodbridge Road. The officers secured an unfurnished house for their mess, and in this respect were perhaps less well off than the men, most of whom fared exceedingly well at the hands of the good folk on whom they were quartered. Headquarters were installed in the workhouse and there the official life of the unit centred. Meals were served there, parades were held on the lawn in front of the building and a guard was kept posted at the gate.

THE UNIT IN ENGLAND.

The unit soon settled down in its new surroundings and the summer sped on, in the main uneventfully. An ordinary day commenced with a very early "staff" parade—six a.m. was it, or even earlier?—and half an hour's physical "jerks." Then back to billets to wash, shave and clean buttons, followed by breakfast in the workhouse and morning parade at 9.30. The morning was usually spent at company and stretcher drill in the fields behind the workhouse. In the hottest summer days, the wily and fortunate developed a sudden and unsuspected passion for signalling and—freed from the more arduous drill and marching—would betake themselves to a distant corner of the field, remote from the "S.M.'s" eagle eye. Arrived there, they would engage in an ecstasy of "flag-wagging." But their enthusiasm seemed surprisingly short-lived. Can it have been that the grateful shelter from the sun's fierce rays which the hedge provided, and the inability of the aforementioned eagle eye to see them, caused the signallers so far to forget themselves as to indulge in a morning siesta?

The afternoons were usually spent in a more leisurely manner, the unit assembling on the lawn in front of the workhouse for a lecture from one of the officers on some branch of R.A.M.C. work. How pleasant those lectures were! We were allowed to dispose ourselves on the grass in recumbent attitudes, and if one could find a sufficiently broad back behind which to shelter, the temptation to sleep—or at least doze—was often quite irresistible. At about 3 p.m. the officer generally appeared to have a sudden realization of the plainly lessening if still polite sense of interest among his listeners, or else perhaps he remembered a pressing engagement in the town for tea, and we would be released. Finished for the day. Splendid! Back to billets and thence off again by the first tram into the town for tea at Limmer and Pipe's. Were ever such meringues or chocolate éclairs produced elsewhere in the whole of the United Kingdom? One unhesitatingly answers "No." In the evenings the Hippodrome, the Lyceum, or

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one of several cinemas was usually the attraction, and then home to bed.

Naturally this programme was not invariably followed. Once a week, usually, there was a field day. On these occasions the unit would set out with overcoats "rolled," haversacks and water bottles filled, the officers on their mounts, the transport bringing up the rear and the band playing popular airs, for the broad expanse of Martlesham Heath, a few miles distant on the way to Woodbridge. Here we would pitch camp and erect a marquee dressing station. Half-a-dozen men detailed to act as "patients" would be distributed about the heath, and after a suitable interval stretcher squads would be sent out to find these patients, dress their "wounds" with first-aid outfits and then carry them back to the dressing station for the more detailed attention of the surgeons and nursing staff. Sometimes these field "days" did not commence till the evening, and the unit would then camp out for the night. In this way we had a foretaste of what sleeping in the open under the stars was like, and who can forget the freshness with which one woke in the dewy morning and turned out for physical jerks and a sprint over the heath before breakfast, followed by the striking of camp, the return march to Ipswich, dinner and then no more parades for the remainder of the day?

In addition to the ordinary daily routine of drills, lectures and field days, a brigade hospital was kept going at the work-house, guards had to be furnished, and many other duties occupied the time and labours of various N.C.O.'s and men—cooks, workshop staff, officers' batmen and orderly room staff, to name only a few—and the ambulance thus gradually developed and became trained as a self-contained and regulated unit.

Zeppelin raids occurred on several occasions during our six months' stay in Ipswich and though, fortunately, none of them did any material damage in our immediate vicinity, they

THE UNIT IN ENGLAND.

served to remind everyone of how near the war was even to us at home in our "tight little island."

And then one eventful day came the news, so eagerly awaited by many of us, that we were shortly to leave for France to join the new division of London troops which was being formed. At last our turn had come, and thenceforward it was only a matter of counting the days until our departure. The unit was made up to strength by the addition of men from the 3rd line at Richmond Park. Several new officers also joined, and it may be of interest to give the names of the officers who went to France with the ambulance. They were Majors Brebner and Sutherland, Captains Rice-Oxley, Jobson Scott, Stewart and Heddy, and Lieutenants Butler, Graham, Clements and Johnson (Quartermaster). Mr. Townsend had already gone abroad as a regimental M.O., and Captain Worboys, to the general regret of all in the unit, left to undertake home service duty on the East Coast.

Final inspections were made by Lieut.-General Sir R. Pole-Carew, K.C.B., and by the A.D.M.S. (Assistant Director, Medical Services), 58th division, last leaves were hurriedly taken, and at midnight on 20th-21st February, 1916, the 2/1st London Field Ambulance "proceeded on active service," to use the official words which recorded with such studied absence of emotion the beginning of what was, to those engaged in it, "the great adventure" of their lives.

Hitherto, though everyone had on the whole been keen enough, it had really only been playing at soldiers. Now we were going to taste the real thing. Most of us had all sorts of notions of what work at the front would be like, notions gathered from others who had been there and—though one smiles now at such childlike credulity—from the highly descriptive accounts of the war correspondents. But all such evidence was at best only second-hand, and those who started out without any preconceived notions and prepared for any and every kind of experience, were probably the least sur-

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prised at the actual occurrences that subsequently fell to their lot.

That last parade on the workhouse lawn was both impressive and thrilling. One's feelings were a strange mixture of gratification and regret and even awe, gratification because the ambition of getting to the front and of really doing something in the war was at last about to be realised, regret at leaving behind so many good friends and familiar surroundings in Ipswich, not to mention "home" and all that truly English word stands for, and, lastly, awe at the unknown path which had so soon to be trodden and which would lead—who could say whither?



Towards the "Line."

WE sailed from SOUTHAMPTON on the evening of the 21st, some 1,200 in all, for, besides ourselves, there were two other ambulances, the 2/2nds and 2/3rds, two field companies (R.E.) and a number of artillery. (The transport crossed separately in a larger but much slower boat.) What a night that was on the "Mona's Queen"! It was bitterly cold, and the sea was so rough that nearly everyone on board was ill, and many must have longed with intense fervour that the wretched old tub would sink with its miserable human cargo to the bottom. But somehow we survived and, seven hours after setting out from Southampton, dragged ourselves wearily on deck to see the old harbour of LE HAVRE wrapped in a mantle of snow, and gleaming bright in the light of a brilliant moon. We disembarked at daylight, spent the day at the docks, and in the evening marched out to the rest camp at Harfleur, a mile or so distant from Le Havre.

In the evening of the following day we entrained in a raging snowstorm, and for a whole night and half the next day journeyed slowly along towards the area of the "line." It was a monotonous and uncomfortable journey, and everyone was devoutly thankful when at last the creaking, groaning, rumbling train came to a stop at the little siding of PONT-

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REMY, and we were able to "disembark" and stretch our cramped and aching limbs. From the railhead a march of four or five miles brought us to what was really our first "home" in the war area—the little village of AIRAINES. Here we came into contact for the first time with other troops of the newly formed 56th Division to which we were being attached, and if memory serves aright our first encounter was a fierce snowball fight with some of the 7th Middlesex, who were also at Airaines. Those first few days in France were interesting but none too enjoyable. The cold was intense, our quarters were a leaky and draughty barn with bare floors and no panes to the windows, and food was meagre and unappetising. But we soon began to find our feet in this new country and to get in touch, so far as was possible with the very limited command of their language which most of us possessed, with the people of the village, and found them in the main kindly and well disposed towards us.

On the following Sunday the unit was on the move again—how often in the years that ensued Sunday proved to be a day not of rest but of more than ordinary activity both in and out of the line! "To-morrow's Sunday, we shall probably be moving," became an oft-heard Saturday lament.

From Airaines we marched to ST. OUVEN (Somme), a small manufacturing town typical of many in that part of France, with one main street of compact brick houses, in which we were billeted among the townspeople. It is interesting to recall that not again until after the signing of the Armistice, nearly three years later, were we in civilian billets. They were good to us, those thrifty, hard-working people of St. Ouen—mostly women, it seemed, for their husbands and sons had all gone to fight for la belle France, and many had already been killed and had left widows and sorrowing families in the little town. Perhaps that made the people the more kind and thoughtful for the comfort of us new and eager ones who had yet to have our first taste of war and death. Anyhow,



THE CHÂTEAU, GRAND RULLECOURT.

TOWARDS THE "LINE."

it was a pleasant fortnight we spent there. Do you remember Marie Rose, the dark, demure, pretty little French girl in the Café Thèry? She must have been the first of many such to whom some of us lost our hearts as we sat in the evenings drinking the good vin rouge chaud of France—it was good in those early days—in the comfortable little café.

And was it not at St. Ouen that we had our first pay parade, our first bath—in disused vats at the local brewery!—and saw our first aeroplane? But we had to press forward, and so after a fortnight at St. Ouen we set off—again on a Sunday—stopping for two nights at BEAUVAL and going thence to IVERGNY. On the way we passed through Doullens, the first town of any considerable size we had seen, and destined to become famous in 1918 as the venue of the conference at which Foch was appointed Generalissimo of the Allied forces.

Ivergny on this occasion—the unit was there on two subsequent rests—was not an attractive spot, and the next move to GRAND RULLECOURT came as a welcome change. This was a pleasant old village, whose life centred round the fine chateau wherein unit headquarters were located. A spell of glorious sunny weather ensued, there was not too much to do, and we spent much of our spare time lying out in the fields lazily enjoying life, or, when the sun was too hot, wandering in the cool shade of the leafy avenues of trees behind the chateau.

From Grand Rullecourt small parties were sent up for instruction with two of the field ambulances of the 14th Division which was holding the line beyond Arras. Things were fairly quiet at that time, and consequently these parties had few thrilling tales to tell on their return, but first impressions of actual trench and aid-post life and conditions were nevertheless full of interest. An amusing incident of this period was that Boggust was twice refused permission to join these parties because he had omitted to shave on the morning of departure. Is it unfair to suggest that quite a number of razors would have

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been lost if this restriction had been in force a few months later?

At Grand Rullecourt the unit was inspected by the A.D.M.S. (Colonel Wilson) and new equipment was issued. Rumours began to circulate that we were to be transferred to the infantry or, alternatively, sent to Malta. (In the Army, rumour fully lived up to her reputation of being a lying jade, and it is hardly an exaggeration to say that had all the rumours during our three years in France, of moves to all quarters of the earth, proved true, the 2/1st London Field Ambulance must surely have travelled all round the world and then some !)

Actually neither of these events came to pass, and on May 5th, 1916, the division went into the line at HEBUTERNE. The ambulance was at this date divided up for the first time, the main body being stationed at SOUASTRE, while " B " section was sent on in advance, part to SAILLY-AU-BOIS and part to the village of Hebuterne.

Sailly was mainly a concentration point for troops proceeding to the line. The ambulance party at first inhabited a large barn in the centre of the village, but subsequently moved to a series of newly constructed dug-outs some few hundred yards away from the village, known as the Rendez-vous. On the day following the final evacuation of the barn in favour of the new quarters, a big enemy shell landed fairly in the barn and distributed its principal wall across the street !

Hebuterne, when we first made its acquaintance, had not entirely escaped attention from the Germans. The church had been heavily shelled, and the whole village bore signs of past conflict. But on the whole it was not an unpleasant spot, and it was possible with reasonable safety to explore the village itself and learn something of the surroundings. The line was quiet—the lull before the storm. The A.D.S. (Advanced Dressing Station) was a well constructed and spacious dug-out built by the R.E.'s assisted by our own men, underneath a

TOWARDS THE "LINE."

house in the centre of the village. Here the little party of "B" section men lived and worked during the unit's first spell up the line.

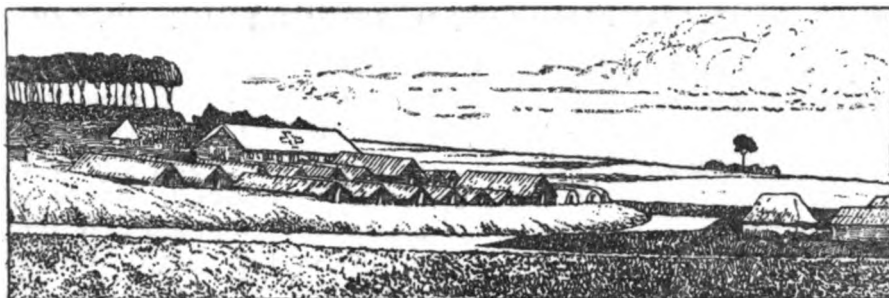
In the meantime the main body had moved from Souastre to a spot just outside the village of COUIN where, under the surveillance of "Uncle" Best, assisted by Wratten, Cook, Fairweather and Campbell, a new and commodious camp of huts and tents quickly sprang up.

Mention ought at this stage to be made of the formation of the divisional concert party—the Bow Bells. Actually they had come into existence at Grand Rullecourt, but it was at Souastre that they first commenced to give regular performances in a huge barn which, when fitted up with a stage, made an excellent concert hall. The party was made up of individuals from various units of the division, and most if not all of them had seen service in the line with their regiments before the 56th Division was formed. They rapidly became one of the best parties in France, and there can be few who served in the division from 1916 until the Armistice who do not look back with gratitude on the Bow Bells for providing them with many happy times of forgetfulness of the more serious and less pleasant things which existed outside the magic spell cast by Dick Horn, Harry Brandon, Fred Moss, "Jock" Holland, Mark Leslie, "Flapper" Chapman and the other members of that merry band. Our thanks to them all!

Whispers soon began to circulate of a big attack to be made by the division as part of a concerted onslaught on the whole of the enemy front, and rumour was on this occasion anything but a "lying jade." Feverish activity was manifest behind our lines, and in the line itself frequent raids for prisoners were made with the object of ascertaining how much the Germans knew or suspected of our intentions. The division also performed a remarkable feat in advancing the whole of their section of the front line by means of extensive digging

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operations carried on at night and quite unsuspected by Fritz until the task was completed, and he saw a new line of trenches arisen as if by magic !



Hebuterne and the Somme, 1916

ON July 1st, 1916, following a week of intense bombardment, the great attack began. It is not within the scope of this little book to enter into details of the battle itself—that has already been done in despatches, histories of the war and numerous other accounts of the Battle of the Somme*—but it is possible to record briefly some impressions of the attack as it affected the fortunes of the ambulance on that memorable day, which to many of those who took part in it will always stand out as the fiercest and most tremendous single episode in the unit's history. The division suffered terribly, and throughout the day streams of walking wounded poured down those narrow trenches from Gommecourt and through the little street of Hebuterne to the A.D.S., while the stretcher bearers made endless journeys backwards and forwards carrying down the worst cases. The bearers of all three ambulances (2/1st, 2/2nd and 2/3rd London) were requisitioned for this occasion, but even so the number of wounded was so great that hundreds who should have never walked at all had to be directed on right down to Sailly-au-bois, and even to Couin, before their wounds could be properly dressed and the most

* "Attack," a little book by Edward G. D. Liveing, gave an excellent and extremely vivid account of the 56th Division's part in the Gommecourt battle. The author was a subaltern in the "Kensingtons."

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serious cases transferred to stretchers. At the A.D.S. in Hebuterne a little band of officers and men worked incessantly hour after hour dressing the worst of the stretcher cases, which were then sent on by motor ambulance to Couin, where the M.D.S. (Main Dressing Station) was established. Here the pressure was, if anything, even greater. Wounded men lying on stretchers covered the whole area of the camp—the huts could only contain a fraction of the cases that poured in—and in 24 hours more than 2,000 wounded were dealt with and evacuated to C.C.S. (Casualty Clearing Station).

At Hebuterne both bearers and nursing staff continued working all through the day and night of July 1st, and it was not till the evening of the 2nd that the tide finally spent itself and an opportunity offered for sleep and rest for aching eyes and limbs. The unit had been wonderfully fortunate but had not escaped unscathed, Hocking having been killed early on the morning of the 1st, and W. L. Tanter seriously wounded (he subsequently died as a result of his wounds), while the younger Tanter and Clyde Harvey were also wounded.

An incident significant of the severity of the attack at Gommecourt and of the heavy casualties suffered on both sides was the offer by the Germans, during the afternoon of the 1st, of an hour's "armistice" to allow each side an opportunity of collecting its own wounded. The suggestion was accepted on our side, but whether through a failure to acquaint our artillery with the facts of the situation or for some other reason (possibly a refusal of Divisional H.Q. to permit the "armistice"), our guns continued firing, the Germans countermanded their "offer," and our stretcher bearers were given ten minutes in which to beat a hasty retreat from No Man's Land!

In connection with the Gommecourt battle, Colonel Brebner was mentioned in despatches, and the M.S.M. (Meritorious Service Medal) was awarded to Meiklejohn and Corporal Rutton (M.T.A.S.C.).



HEBUTERNE. THE A.D.S.

HEBUTERNE AND THE SOMME, 1916.

After the fierce fighting of July 1st the front at Hebuterne became quiet, the centre of the battle being transferred further south, where greater success had attended the army's efforts to pierce the enemy's lines. The 56th Division, therefore, though remaining in the line, was not immediately engaged in further "pushes." The ambulance was relieved at Hebuterne and, re-assembling its scattered groups at Couin, moved a few days later to MONDICOURT, a small village near Pas, and there took over the Divisional Rest Station.

The D.R.S. was well situated in a sloping meadow, whose confines were marked by a line of magnificent trees which gave quite a park-like appearance to the scene. The camp itself consisted of huts and tents with accommodation for several hundreds of sick, and most of this accommodation was soon occupied. This meant hard work for everyone, especially the nursing staff, but the change from the line was very welcome, and the open-air life and surroundings soon established the popularity of our new quarters. On several evenings the divisional band played in the grounds, and was immensely appreciated by all. What a benign old boy the white-haired band-major was!

One or two amusing incidents occurred at Mondicourt that are perhaps worth recalling. One was the famous "cow-milking" episode. Complaints having been made that the cows belonging to a farm adjoining the camp had been surreptitiously milked when the farmer was not at hand, strict orders were issued that the animals must on no account be interfered with. A day or so later "Jerry" Morgan, mess-tin in hand and fresh from a secret milking operation, was spotted by a watchful N.C.O., who in severe tones addressed the smiling "Jerry" thus: "Morgan, go and put that milk back at once!"

The other incident concerned two of the officers, Captain Braham and another. The former had joined the ambulance at Couin after some 16 months in charge of a motor ambulance

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convoy. He soon became deservedly popular in the unit for, in addition to being an exceptionally clever surgeon, he was a most cheery soul, and early made his presence felt by some very amusing practical jokes, for which he had a real "flair." On the occasion in question he solemnly assured the orderly officer for the day that it was the O.C.'s wish that an inspection of jack-knives should be made throughout the rest station during the evening. The orderly officer, who had not long been with the unit, may have been surprised at the order but did not for a moment doubt its authenticity, and at a late hour—when it was certain that all the patients would be in bed—proceeded to make an exhaustive examination of jack-knives throughout the camp! History does not record his feelings when he learned the truth, but it is not unreasonable to suppose they were somewhat mixed! And some of the patients were quite annoyed at being wakened from their beauty sleep to produce their jack-knives!

Another recollection of our stay in Mondicourt is of having a glimpse of H.M. the King as he passed through the village on his return from a visit to the front. We had hopes that he might stop and inspect the camp, but it was chiefly by a cloud of dust as the royal car sped past that we were made aware of his presence in the neighbourhood.

On August 23rd, after a stay of about six weeks at Mondicourt, we once more set out and, as was not infrequently the case, the ultimate destination was to most of us unknown. Stopping for one night at REMAISNIL, we reached GUESCHART on the second day. In this pleasant little village we "rested" for a fortnight, although it deserves mentioning that the "rest" included what seemed, to those who had been through their baptism of fire, certain undeserved indignities—daily cleaning of buttons, parades, and even a kit inspection.

It was during this period that Campbell created a painful sensation by falling down a deep well. He was rescued with

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no worse injury—marvellous to relate—than a broken ankle, which served to take him home to England. He quickly recovered and subsequently went out East, seemingly none the worse for an alarming experience which might well have cost him his life.

On September 2nd we left Gueschart for the Somme, and there followed the most strenuous and exhausting period in the unit's history. Division again took place into "tent" and "bearer" groups, and the bearers were further split up by the detachment of squads of 8 men to each of the four battalions (1st and 3rd London, 7th and 8th Middlesex) of the 167th Infantry Brigade—this being a new practice which, according to report at the time, had not previously fallen to the lot of any field ambulance. The division remained in action on the Somme for nearly six weeks. It is clearly impossible to trace the wanderings and trials of each of the small groups into which the ambulance was divided, and consequently a brief outline of the main events and the places with which they were connected must suffice. The parting of the ways took place at a camp ironically named NEW LONDON. Thereafter the nursing section was stationed, first at a camp near BRONFAY FARM and subsequently at CARNOY. The bearers' first "port of call" was BILLON FARM, near Maricourt. Lest the term "farm" should conjure up a vision of peace and prosperity, it is perhaps desirable to give a brief description of the new war area in which we now found ourselves. It was no longer the region of shops and houses, or even of small hamlets and fields with cattle contentedly grazing therein, such as we had been accustomed to seeing, but a scene of unparalleled bareness—a vast plain, almost entirely treeless, traversed by dusty roads all leading to the line. Tents and bivouacs covered the whole expanse, and the roads swarmed with vehicles of every description. The whole scene might have been an extremely entertaining and animated one had it not been for the absence of any suggestion of nature

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and the consequent impression of desolation and barrenness which that absence created. And yet there were human details of interest in plenty to be observed. One would see such differing spectacles as an English Tommy—stripped naked—having a bath in a disused petrol tin (this always seemed to cause intense amusement to any French soldiers who happened to witness it*); other Tommies perhaps putting up a bivouac or sitting about eating their rations to an accompaniment of laughter, jokes among themselves, and humorous comments from passers-by; near by a splendid troop of French cavalry, smartly equipped and mounted on fierce-looking Arab steeds, and over there a company of French infantry, not nearly as smart as their brothers in the saddle, but wonderful fighters none the less, dour, determined-looking men, but always ready with a cheery “bon jour.” And all around, carefully camouflaged, there were guns of every size and type ready to belch forth “packets” for the Bosche, while up above aeroplanes hummed hither and thither apparently quite regardless of all the din and bustle beneath. Such is a brief general impression of the area in the rear of the line. Nearer the line itself, where human sights and sounds seemed fewer in number, the desolation was even more complete, and the bearers’ first rendezvous was appropriately named “The Valley of Death.”

It may not be out of place at this point to explain very briefly the disposition of the bearers and the method of evacuation of wounded introduced during this first battle of the Somme, and followed in the main in all subsequent “stunts” in which the division was engaged. Each of the three field ambulances contributed its quota of 32 bearers to the three infantry brigades. The remainder of the bearers were then “pooled” under the command of the O.C. of one of the ambulances for the duration of the stunt. By this means

* The 56th Division was at this time near the extreme right of the British line, and consequently in touch with the left of the French Army.



UNIT BEARERS ON THE SOMME WITH TRANSPORT. (Official War Photograph.)

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the work of evacuating wounded was more easily co-ordinated and distributed and reliefs at regular intervals were facilitated. On the Somme the distances over which the wounded had to be carried on stretchers were abnormally great owing to the absence of proper roads and the consequent inability of motor or even horse ambulances to approach within several miles of the actual front line. A system of relays of bearers was accordingly instituted, and by this means a wounded man was carried right down from the line by successive squads of bearers until the horse ambulance was reached. The horse ambulance then carried him a stage further to the motor ambulance and the latter completed the battle-area evacuation by removing him to the M.D.S., whence he would ultimately be taken by motor convoy to C.C.S. and thence by the hospital train to the base, and, if he were lucky, by hospital ship from the base to England! To return to the bearers, arrangements were made for squads to be periodically interchanged, thus ensuring that each party spent so many days in the more advanced area, after which they would return to the bearers' headquarters for rest, while another party who had been resting went up to take their place.

The division made its first attack on September 9th, and thereafter for the next month constant attacks were being launched from some part of the divisional front. Heavy casualties were sustained and this naturally meant long and trying periods of stretcher bearing. Throughout the battle rain fell frequently and the ground rapidly became indescribably bad. Roads ceased to exist, or at best degenerated into mere tracks, pitted with shell holes at every few yards and churned up and re-churned by the constant stream of gun limbers, pack mules, and other transport supplying the line. The lot of the bearers who had to carry their loads of wounded for long distances under these conditions was not a happy one, and more than one infantryman, slogging along under the weight of the vast amount of impedimenta that most unfortu-

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nate yet most heroic of all branches of the great war machine had to carry, was heard to remark that he would not change jobs with the ambulance stretcher bearers for any consideration.

From the Valley of Death the tide of battle moved on to Angle and Leuze (commonly called "Lousy") Woods. The Germans at this stage were resisting our repeated attacks with desperate fierceness, and Lousy Wood in particular was the scene of much extremely bitter fighting in which both sides suffered heavy casualties. The ground was daily becoming worse, and it is no exaggeration to say that the bearers were being tested to the extreme limit of their powers.

On September 15th, we had our first sight of the tanks. Their secret had been remarkably well kept and until they first went into action we knew almost as little about these new engines of war as did the Germans, and much interest and amusement were caused by their ambling progress through our midst on their way to the line.

On September 26th, the 56th Division joined with the adjacent French division in the capture of Combles. This notable achievement was happily commemorated by *Punch* in a cartoon showing an English Tommy (of the 56th Division) and a French poilu shaking hands and congratulating each other on their joint success.

Following the capture of Combles, the division was relieved, but only for a few days, at the end of which it again went into action on the left of the previous position. The respite, though welcome, was therefore of the briefest duration, and by October 2nd the unit was once more in the thick of things, first at GUILLEMONT and later, as the line was advanced, at GUINCHY and LES BŒUFS.

On the 9th we were finally relieved. Some few of the bearers returned to the M.D.S. at Carnoy, where the other half of the unit had been working at high pressure for weeks past; the majority, however, remained for the time being with the 2/2nd bearers and with them went by 'bus to Vaux-en-

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Amienois, rejoining their own unit some days later. On the 18th, the last of the ambulance bade farewell to the Somme and all its vast expanse of muddy desolation, thus closing a chapter in which the strain and labour of six weary weeks had seemed like one long, unrelieved nightmare to all who had taken part in it. We had lost Fairweather (killed), Perry and Ransley (died of wounds) and in addition some eleven others wounded or "shell-shocked," while a much larger number had been evacuated sick, so that it was a very much depleted unit that finally arrived at PICQUIGNY for rest and re-inforcement.

From Picquigny we moved on in a day or so to AIRAINES where the unit had been eight months earlier, but our stay was on this second occasion a brief one of only two or three days' duration. On the evening before our departure, the "S.M." organised an impromptu concert with the object of finding out what talent there might be in the unit for the formation of a concert party. The show proved a great success, Andy Broom bringing the house down with his impersonation of Ethel Levey, while much other unsuspected talent was revealed.

The following morning we entrained at LONGPRÉ and, travelling northwards throughout the day, arrived in the evening at MERVILLE, detrained and marched to ESTAIRES, and after a stay there of only two days crossed the River Lys and took over our new quarters at LA GORGUE, a small town in the La Bassée-Laventie area.



A Quieter Front

THE new surroundings and the conditions under which we now found ourselves were soon seen to be very different from those of the dreaded Somme area. Here the front was remarkably quiet—casualties through the hands of the field ambulance which we relieved had averaged only one or two weekly, and rumour even spoke of cafés in No-Man's-land, and police patrolling the trenches to warn off enterprising civilians who came to sell chocolate and newspapers to the troops! Life at the A.D.S.'s, of which there were two on this new front (La Flinque and Green Barn), was consequently by no means hard, nor was the amount of work excessive, and many preferred the free and easy existence there to the rather more restricted and conventional atmosphere which prevailed at the M.D.S. at La Gorgue owing to the presence in the town of Divisional Headquarters and its attendant plentiful supply of Staff "red-caps." Orders were frequently issued at this period regarding the necessity for the strict observance of the duty of saluting superior officers, with particular reference to the General whenever he might be encountered. Was it Boswell who on one occasion in a sudden access of zeal gave a most elaborate and beautifully executed salute to the G.O.C.'s quite empty car?

A QUIETER FRONT.

La Gorgue was a dirty, unsavoury little town, and the unit would certainly have been more comfortably housed in the neighbouring town of Estaires or at Merville, where the 2/2nds were stationed. But we had come from the desolation of the Somme, and in comparison even La Gorgue was a paradise. The M.D.S. and hospital were situated in a commodious building which also housed the officers' mess, and the three sections, A, B and C, were billeted in the upper rooms of houses in the main street of the town.

The Bow Bells came into prominence again at this time, and their show was quite one of the attractions of the town. Since Souastre days they had acquired some new talent, chief among the finds being Jock Holland from the London Scottish, who rapidly became one of the leading members of the party, with his wonderful female impersonations and pleasing voice. They produced a sparkling revue, "Bohemia," and followed this up at Christmas with a most elaborate version of "Aladdin" which set the seal to their fame.

The unit concert party had meanwhile been formed, and on Christmas Day, 1916, "Dick Whittington" was produced with unqualified success in the local Y.M.C.A. hut. Strenuous rehearsal and much preliminary thought had been given to the show, and the enthusiasm with which it was received was fully merited. To name the whole cast would take up too much space, but special praise was due to Terry Lester for his work as producer and also in the rôle of "Dick." Broom as "Alice," and Tom Dewey, indefatigable and immensely funny as "Idle Jack," John Alban, Beal, "Go" Ross, Fisher, Johns, Levi and "Bob" Wright were all excellent; and last but by no means least the Sergeant-Major was an enthusiastic and ever-resourceful stage manager.

The show ran for several weeks at La Gorgue and also went on tour to other units in the 56th Division and to the New Zealand Division at Sailly. The New Zealanders were particularly delighted with "Dick Whittington," and gave the

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whole party a most uproarious reception on each of the three nights of its visit. Finally, a command performance was given in La Gorgue, at which Major-General Hull and his staff were present. The show went brilliantly, and at the final curtain the General thanked everyone concerned and added, "I knew we had the best show in the Army (he was, referring, of course, to the Bow Bells), it seems now that we have the two best." Which was surely as charming a compliment as could have been paid to those to whom it was addressed.

The concert party was not the only form of diversion provided in La Gorgue. An enthusiastic debating society used to foregather regularly at the Y.M.C.A. hut, and 2/1st men were among the most prominent and successful speakers. Two memorable debates were "home and away fixtures" with the New Zealanders, and it is not without interest to recall the motions on those two occasions and the fate attending them. The first, "That the good effects of the war will outweigh the evil," was lost, though not by many votes; the second, "That the Dominions have more to teach Great Britain than Great Britain has to teach them," also did not find favour with the majority.

Football, too, was much in vogue, and the ambulance team distinguished itself on several occasions. In the first round of the divisional cup three meetings were necessary before the 3rd London Regiment were beaten. Sizmur, Len Ross and Dewey all did great things, and Pitkin seemed never so happy as when the ground was literally a sea of mud, which at this time was generally the case. In the second round we defeated Brigade H.Q. after another drawn game, but succumbed in the succeeding round.

Several new officers had joined the unit during the summer and autumn of 1916, replacing others who, owing to sickness, transfers to regimental duties and other causes, had left us. Among the newcomers mention should perhaps be made of Captain Murray, whose prehistoric wooden stethoscope pro-

A QUIETER FRONT.

vided one of the periodic jokes which served occasionally to enliven an otherwise somewhat tedious morning sick parade. On the days on which Captain Murray was orderly officer his stethoscope was generally to be found awaiting his arrival in the medical inspection room, standing upright on the table and doing duty as a flower vase, with blossoms tastefully arranged therein to their and the stethoscope's (?) mutual advantage!

The unit was further reinforced at La Gorgue by the arrival of several members of the original (1st line) field ambulance who had left England for Malta in 1914 and had now completed their period of service out there and been sent home on leave before coming to France to join the 2nd line.

Yet another addition to the strength who certainly deserves mention was Fritz, a small canine recruit who, according to legend, deserted from the Germans in order to attach himself to us.

During this winter period certain societies or "cliques" began to make themselves prominent in the unit. Perhaps the best known and certainly the most vocal were the "Bing Boys," concerning whom strange stories of mystic rites and threats of dire pains and penalties on any who opposed the will of the society were frequently told. Other "cliques" were the "Sine qua nons" and the "Intellectuals." The latter consisted of certain quite harmless but supposedly high-brow young gentlemen who babbled of books and poetry and also discussed the more serious things of life. The name "Intellectuals," it need hardly be added, was not self-imposed, and a factor which caused not a little amusement to some of the wits was the alacrity with which certain of its members endeavoured to deny their association with the society. A subsequent union which took place between the "Intellectuals" and another group known as the "Food Hogs," for the purpose of holding occasional rather select little dinner parties, led to the joint society being christened "The Ethicures." This witty epithet, coined by Bob Groom, was adopted with acclamation.

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In the main, the front remained quiet during the unit's stay at La Gorgue, no one was overworked, and the weeks and months and our first Christmas in France came and went without any event of great importance beyond the pantomime and the other activities already referred to. Unfortunately a serious occurrence marked the advent of 1917. On New Year's Day itself the Germans took it into their heads to shell the A.D.S. at La Flinque. Captain Simpson, who had only very recently joined the ambulance, was seriously wounded (he subsequently died of his wounds), as also were Robinson and Moule, the latter losing a leg, while several others were badly shaken up through being buried in the collapse of a dug-out. Several of those who were not wounded displayed great courage and resourcefulness on this occasion, and Captain Braham was awarded the M.C. and Siphthorp the D.C.M. for their gallant conduct.

1917—Arras Re-visited

JANUARY and February otherwise passed uneventfully, but with the arrival of March came also the news that our long stay in this area was nearly at an end, and by the 5th of the month the unit was again on the move. The whole of our journey on this occasion was accomplished by road. On the first day we marched to LESTREM, staying there for one night, and on succeeding days we reached HAVERSKERQUE, PERNES (a long march this of nearly 23 kilometres), CROISETTE and finally IVERGNY, where we had been a year earlier. From Ivergny we again moved on to WARLUZEL, where the whole ambulance was billeted in one large shed containing tiers on tiers of wire beds, the topmost of which could generally only be reached by stepping on the unfortunate individuals who inhabited the lower rows. The constant scrambling up and down which this primitive system of bunks entailed soon earned for the building the appropriate name of the monkey house.

Ten days' rest at Warluzel provided opportunity for much football activity, including a unit match against the Edinburgh R.E.'s, inter-sectional matches and also "sixes," these latter producing much keen rivalry. The next move was to MONCHIET, a dreadful camp of Nissen huts amidst a sea of mud and far too reminiscent of the Somme to be anything but very unpleasant. "B" Section then departed to BEAUMETZ to take over the "diveesional r-r-rest station" under Captain Murray, and the other two sections moved up to AGNY near Arras, in readiness for the big stunt which was seen to be imminent.

The attack (which came to be spoken of in the unit as "the first Arras stunt") was launched on Easter Monday, April 9th, after a prolonged and fierce bombardment. Early successes led to a rapid advance of the British line. The 56th Division was particularly successful in the early days of the battle, NEUVILLE-VITASSE being captured on the first day and

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HENINEL three days later. Casualties, however, were by no means light, and the bearers were kept even more than usually busy evacuating the wounded and at the same time pushing on just in the rear of the infantry. Unfortunately, the weather became very bad—much rain and snow fell and it turned bitterly cold, and, with the German resistance hardening, the fond hopes that the cavalry might at last be given their opportunity of a big “break-through” were once again doomed to disappointment. The advance was checked, as far as the 56th Division was concerned, with the line in front of Heninel, that village, however, remaining in our hands.

In the meantime, the D.R.S. had moved from Beaumetz to ACHICOURT, whither the bearers, who had had a long spell of heavy work during the advance, came back for temporary reliefs and rest. From Achicourt the ambulance went out for a brief spell to LA CAUCHIE and GRENAS. Within a week, however, we were again in the line, the return journey from Grenas by motor lorries taking us first to HABARCQ and thence on to DUISANS. From there the bearers were sent up to WANCOURT, the division having taken over a front to the left of the previous position at Heninel. Another party went to TILLOY and headquarters were established in ARRAS itself.

The bearers' headquarters were located in a deep chalk cave at Wancourt, which certainly provided better shelter than the usual very temporary and unprotected bivouac, but the atmosphere of the cave was—well, to put it mildly—not particularly healthy.

On the morning of May 3rd the division again attacked, but the actual objective seems to have been obscure, with the result that at least one battalion advanced too far and was compelled to retire later at the cost of heavy casualties. The bearers had a very warm time, especially one party led by Captain Braham, which had to make its way through an intense enemy barrage to clear wounded from a big crater on the



2/1ST BEARERS AT REGIMENTAL AID POST NEAR WANCOURT. (Official War Photograph.)

1917—ARRAS RE-VISITED.

Arras-Cambrai road. Those who filed through that wall of fire are not likely to forget the experience, and it was almost miraculous that the party did not sustain heavy losses.

The division remained in action for three weeks after the attack of May 3rd, and the ambulance was consequently kept busy in supplying continual reliefs of bearers to the line, and as attachments to the infantry battalions. The results of the six weeks' fighting proved very disappointing to those who had been encouraged by the successes which had attended the opening stages of the battle, but subsequent knowledge revealed the fact that radical alterations had been rendered necessary in the plans for the offensive owing to the comparative failure which had attended the French offensive under General Nivelle. Indeed, the British attack, from being quite a subsidiary one designed in the first instance as a diversion to assist our French allies, became, through the non-success of the French scheme, the principal phase of the battle and had to be persisted in in order to relieve the Allied situation as a whole, although this, of course, was not generally known at the time. The apparent failure of their attacks and the heavy casualties sustained by the 56th and other British divisions caused much heart-searching and considerable criticism of our leadership which was later shown to be largely misinformed and unmerited. The ambulance was fortunate in sustaining remarkably few losses when the heavy nature of the fighting in which it had played its part is considered. Unhappily, Tweed was killed on the very morning on which the bearers were finally relieved. Some ten others were wounded during the "stunt" and two motor ambulances were also knocked out by shell fire on the Arras-Cambrai Road. Military Medals were subsequently awarded to four members of the unit for good work in this first Arras battle.

On May 21st, the last of the bearers to be relieved joined the main body of the unit on the Arras-Doullens road, and three days later we marched out for a well-earned rest to

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GOUVES, near Agnez-les-Duisans. There we found the 2/3rds already installed in a compact block of huts which, judging by the barbed wire surrounding them on every side, had previously been used as an assembly camp for German prisoners-of-war. For the next fortnight we shared this camp with the 2/3rds, they occupying one side and ourselves the other, and this rest proved one of the most enjoyable the unit ever spent. The weather was perfect and the camp was sufficiently far removed from the war area for us to forget, at any rate temporarily, the sights and sounds of which the preceding months had provided us with our full share. The surroundings were ideal, and the companionship of the 2/3rds completed the success of a really memorable epoch in the unit's history.

Beyond a few somewhat tiresome inspections which necessitated much cleaning up and polishing of buttons and equipment, we were left to do pretty much as we liked, and most of the days were spent in lazing in the cool shelter of the woods adjoining the camp or bathing in the icy cold stream at Agnez-les-Duisans. At night many slept out under the sky with no more than a ground sheet for protection. An inter-ambulance sports meeting, for which the energetic ones trained vigorously, was held in the fields close to the camp, and cricket and swimming matches were also arranged, but the impression of this fortnight which chiefly remains in the mind is one of days of broiling sunshine when it was too hot to do anything but laze. The time passed all too quickly, and one fine morning in the second week of June, the 2/1st took the road again to the strains of the regimental band, and cheers from those good friends the 2/3rds, who turned out in force and gave us a most warm send-off with many expressions of regret that the pleasant joint tenancy of the "bird-cage" had so soon come to an end.

Our destination was ARRAS once more, this time the hospital St. Jean, which we took over as a D.R.S. from another field ambulance. In peace time it must have been a splendid

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hospital this, with its capacious wards, shady courtyards and pleasant surroundings. Now its former glories had departed and gaping shell holes in the walls and a general untidy, and, in parts, dilapidated air told a vivid tale of war and destruction. But the hospital was not entirely untenanted. Sisters of Mercy, who in happier days had tended the sick within its walls, still remained faithfully at their posts and had done so all through the war, even when the enemy had been close to the city and when fierce fighting raged within a stone's throw almost of the hospital. Somehow those brave, yet gentle and fragile women—clad in their dark, flowing nun's garb—seemed strangely out of keeping with the surroundings in which they moved, but they would not be persuaded to leave and so they laboured on, still tending the civilian sick from the town and still making their devotions in the beautiful little chapel which adjoined the entrance to the hospital.

For five weeks the ambulance remained at St. Jean running the D.R.S. Work was plentiful and the hours were long, but it was better than the line and so we did not grumble. The concert party was resurrected and christened "The Issues." They gave nightly performances in the big mess room fitted up as a concert hall. Tom Dewey was again the bright particular star and carried the whole show on his back. He was ably supported by Andy Broom, Levi, Johns, Fletcher, Beal, Weeks and others. On the first night of the show a new officer, Captain Baynes, appeared as an extra turn and was received with immense enthusiasm. The Bow Bells were also showing in the theatre in Arras at this time and gave one remarkable command performance to which all sorts of famous people came. Sir Douglas Haig was expected but did not arrive, but divisional commanders and brigadiers could be counted by the score, and the brilliance of the spectacle and the performance itself would have done credit to a West-end first night.

About this time, Clyde Harvey, who had been in England

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since being wounded at Hebuterne, rejoined the division as a padre, and it was good indeed to see him again—while he, on his side, was evidently delighted at his good fortune in getting back to the old division.

On July 4th, the unit left St. Jean and marched out on rest again, stopping the first night at GOUY-EN-ARTOIS and the next day arriving for the third time at IVERGNY. On this occasion Ivergny proved much more enjoyable, for the weather was perfect and in place of the mud, dirt and squalor with which the village had previously been associated in our minds, everything now seemed fresh and green and immensely attractive.

During the two and a half weeks' rest here, a brigade gymkhana and sports were held at which the 2/1st representatives greatly distinguished themselves by securing six first and three second places out of 14 events, Billy Webb winning the quarter-mile in great style from several notable brigade athletes. The prizes were given away by a very charming and chic French countess, after which the G.O.C. presented several medals. A massed band performance and a concert by "The Issues" concluded a most successful function. Tennis, cricket and badminton were also much in vogue during this period so that there was no lack of energetic entertainment for all who felt that way inclined.

Everyone was inoculated, but the ordeal was not by any means a terrifying one, especially as it entitled the "victim" to two days "off," on the second of which he was usually feeling remarkably fit again and quite game for a trip to Doullens and such benefits of civilised life as were to be found in that not unattractive town!

Our last night at Ivergny was quite a memorable one. No one went to bed—we all "bivouaced" in the orchard, which was lit up by fairy lamps hung in the trees; the whole effect was most picturesque and the time passed merrily with snatches of song that would every now and then break forth from one or

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other of the little groups scattered about the grass. At 2.30 a.m. we paraded and marched in the early morning light to FREVENT, where we entrained. After a four hours' journey we "disembarked" at ARQUES, near St. Omer, and from Arques marched within sight of, though without actually passing through St. Omer, to SALPERWICK, a pleasant little village where we were destined to spend ten very enjoyable days. A stream flowed near and provided splendid opportunities for both swimming and boating, and the village itself boasted several quite respectable cafés wherein one could obtain an excellent variety of liqueurs; the weather was glorious, and no one was overworked so what more could the simple soul of man require? If the village itself ceased to attract, all that was necessary was to take a boat—the cool of the evening was the best time for this, for the days were almost excessively hot even for the time of the year—and to row slowly up the winding stream whose banks were dotted here and there with pretty, old-fashioned cottages—then choose the remotest and most picturesque of these little dwellings; tie up the boat and enter, and, smiling with becoming grace at Madame, sit down to enjoy the delectable supper which she would produce with almost magical speed from some inner sanctum whose mysteries remained unrevealed!—and later, as it grew dark, row back and fancy the scene might be some quaint backwater of peaceful England, far, very far removed from war's alarms and excursions. If more life and excitement were desired, they might be had by visiting St. Omer. This seemed a big town in comparison with most we had visited and had the air of being, even in war time, decidedly prosperous and alive, with its fine "grande place," big shops and busy cafés and other up-to-date attractions. Moreover, the town was full of troops, while nurses too and "Waacs"—the latter of whom we saw for the first time—were to be seen in large numbers, and all assisted in creating an atmosphere of lively interest such as was to be found only in very few of the towns in the war area.



Ypres to Cambrai

ON July 31st, 1917, the third battle of Ypres began. As if to spite the desperate efforts which it was known were to be made in an attempt to drive the Germans back on this sector, the weather, which up to the eve of the attack had been glorious, now broke up completely, and three days of incessant rain ensued. Salperwick in wet weather was not attractive and there was little to do but idle in billets and wait for the downpour to cease.

On August 5th, the unit was again on the move. Entrain-ing at St. Omer, a four hours' journey brought us to POPERINGHE. From there we marched back to STEEN-VOORDE for one night, retracing our steps the next day and arriving eventually at OUDERDOM, some eight kilometres behind Ypres.

This was the division's first experience of the dreaded Salient which for three years had been the scene of the fiercest and most bitter fighting on the whole British front. Ypres—or, as it was commonly called, "Wipers"—was never a quiet sector and divisions arrived there with feelings of awe not un-mixed with despair, and departed, after their turn in the line, with unconcealed relief whatever might be in store for them at the next stage.

Even in the area behind the line, conditions seemed different from those in any other part of the front. Instead

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of the ramshackle but picturesque barns and cottages to which we had become so accustomed, we now saw only wooden structures, all evidently erected during the war to house the civilian refugees who had seen their homes destroyed and had themselves been forced to retreat during earlier heavy fighting, but had now returned in the hope that the enemy would be driven back finally from this ill-fated and desolate region, and that they would once more be able to live among the ruins of their former prosperity, frugally and sadly, no doubt, but nevertheless unmolested and with the hope of gradual recovery and perhaps one day, when the war should end, a return to the peaceful, industrious life they had once known. Most of these people spoke English quite well—the result of continuous contact since 1914 with British troops—and on the whole they were obliging and civil, even if they lacked the kindness and friendly natures of the French peasantry among whom our lot had so far been mainly cast.

A few days were spent at Ouderdom, during which time the two London divisions—the 47th and 56th—were in close proximity to one another, and there was much meeting of brothers and friends in the various units. On August 8th the waiting period came to an end and the ambulance began to be split up, one party going to DICKEBUSCH to run the Corps main dressing station, while another went to the 44th C.C.S. at BRANDHOEK to assist there during the forthcoming stunt. A day or so later the remainder of the unit—the bearers—departed to join the 2/2nds or were attached to the several infantry battalions of the 167th brigade. The 2/2nd headquarters were at Woodcote Farm, between Dickebusch and Ypres, and from there bearers were sent up in parties to YPRES itself.

Ypres!—the name was so often heard on men's lips, that one seemed to know that grim and tragic city of the dead by heart in spite of never having seen it. And yet one experienced a renewed sense of awe and wonder at the first actual

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vision of its tremendous and heartbreaking ruin and desolation, far surpassing anything previously witnessed, as it appeared outlined against the sky in the gathering dusk of that summer evening when first we approached its gates. Truly a bitter monument to the savage passions of war!

The attack commenced on the morning of August 16th, after a barrage which also seemed to surpass in intensity any that had preceded former attacks in which the division had taken part. Unfortunately, though some measure of success attended the first onslaught, the advance was not consolidated and the infantry sustained terribly heavy losses—so heavy indeed that they necessitated the withdrawal of the division from the line almost immediately after the attack. No fewer than seven battalion commanders were killed or wounded during the first few hours, and the total losses of the division exceeded 5,000 in the course of two days' fighting.

How did the field ambulances fare? The bearers had an almost overwhelming task carrying wounded through Sanctuary and Chateau Woods past the Hooze Crater and down to the Menin Road, where they were met by the motor ambulances which relieved them of their loads and then sped away down the Menin Road, through Ypres, and on to the M.D.S. at Dickebusch while the bearers returned to the regimental aid posts for more wounded. The carrying track was nothing more than a single line of duckboards winding its way along through a veritable sea of mud, and one false step might well have proved fatal, as was evident from the numbers of drowned men (and horses) who could at intervals be seen almost completely submerged in that dreadful swamp.

The German artillery was even more than usually active, and several parties of bearers had the narrowest of escapes from salvos of shells which might have been aimed directly at them, so uncannily did the shells seem to dog their very footsteps. In fact it is probable that the enemy field guns actually had the



STRETCHER BEARERS IN DIFFICULTIES IN FLANDERS MUD. (Official War Photograph.)

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tracks under direct observation and were firing with open sights. One party of 2/1st men on their way up to an aid post had the unusual and alarming experience of meeting scattered and fleeing remnants who shouted as they rushed past "You can't possibly go up there, it's murder, the Germans are advancing and everyone is being killed." Fortunately, the situation was not quite so desperate as all that but it certainly was most unpleasantly "warm."

The following day (17th) the bearers were all relieved and returned to Ouderdom, and a week later the unit bade farewell to the Salient, with, as may be imagined, no faintest shadow of regret, but only thankfulness at having come through a "stunt" which for severity of fighting and appalling conditions had not been surpassed by any previous experiences. Three of the bearers, Newton, Quirk and Skinner, were killed during the battle, while Aubrey Cox, one of the oldest members of the unit and a general favourite whose loss was felt most keenly, died of wounds caused by a shell from a long distance enemy gun at the C.C.S. some miles behind the line. Eight others were wounded (three slightly) and two were badly "shell-shocked." The unit subsequently received recognition of its labours during the attack by the award of several Military Medals among the bearers.

A long train journey from the line brought the unit this time to EPERLECQUES, a small village near St. Omer and not far from Salperwick, where we had been before going up to Ypres. There was no river nor consequently the enjoyment of bathing and boating at Eperlecques, but it was a pleasant spot nevertheless, and the week's rest was very welcome. Visits to St. Omer were again the order of the day, and a renewed acquaintance therewith after the desolation of Ypres and its surroundings served to strengthen the opinion previously formed that St. Omer was quite one of the best towns we had encountered.

At the end of August we left this area for a very different

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part of the line. A long train journey viâ Arras brought us to BAPAUME. The tide of war had passed through this town and the surrounding neighbourhood, and in its course had wrought great havoc and destruction. Now, everything was desolate and deserted and our footsteps echoed strangely as we passed through the town and on to the small village of BARASTRE. Here the unit rested three days, at the end of which a further move was made to BEUGNY, once a village on the Bapaume-Cambrai road but now only a collection of derelict and shell-shattered walls which had once been houses. Headquarters were a compact camp of Nissen huts and marquees well laid out and conveniently planned, which had been used by previous field ambulances. We found that this was to be the M.D.S. and that several posts up the line had also to be manned. The front appeared, however, to be quiet, and prospects generally looked bright, especially as leave warrants promised to come along in more generous fashion than had hitherto been the case.

Work commenced at once, with a view to improving the camp. A large recreation room consisting of several Nissen huts built end-on to one another soon began to take shape, and Thirtle earned fame and much good-natured banter by an ambitious drainage scheme, the only flaw in which—so the wits had it—was that the waste water was expected to flow upwards but most inconsiderately refused to perform this simple operation! The weather at this time was particularly fine and improvements at the camp could therefore proceed apace, so that our new home soon presented a most spick and span appearance. The transport lines were situated about half a mile away on the road leading to the next village of Frémicourt. Divisional headquarters were situated at the latter place; the Bow Bells also were soon installed in a capacious barn in the village. Their new show, a musical mélange based on "The Maid of the Mountains" and entitled "Well I'm —," was a truly wonderful production; everyone in the show was

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excellent, and if anyone had to be singled out for special mention it was perhaps Jock Holland in José Collins' part—he had never done better. The old barn used to resound with the applause of the packed audiences who nightly thronged there.

Beugny, it has been said, was the M.D.S. The A.D.S. was at LAGNICOURT, where the unit occupied two or three of a whole chain of dug-outs in a sunken road, the other occupants being the brigade staff and small detachments of engineers and signals corps. Nearer the line again were two other sunken roads in each of which we had posts, and the duties were shared in such a way that each bearer squad had a turn first at the A.D.S., then at each of the posts and then back again at the A.D.S. The front was remarkably quiet—so quiet that it was most unusual to hear a gun fired—and the bearers at the posts had generally not more than one journey a day, and that only down to the A.D.S. to fetch rations and post or to take down any sick from the battalions. The remainder of the day was usually spent in eating, reading and sleeping, particularly the latter. Sleeping the clock round was no uncommon occurrence!

With so little to do and with a long succession of glorious days, the thoughts of everyone turned more and more frequently to the question of leave and all that those wonderful but all too brief ten days held in store. Towards the end of September the long awaited allotment of leave began to come through, and in the weeks that followed the greater part of the unit went home and returned.

At Beugny, sport was not neglected, and both soccer and rugby were much in favour. Among "indoor" activities, ping-pong became all the rage and was played from early morning until late at night in the recreation room. Freddie Beal and O. F. Squires soon established their right to be called the unit ping-pong champions, though several others ran them very close.

October passed uneventfully and it was the middle of

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November before rumours began to circulate of an impending "do" on our front. Everything was kept very quiet, however, a fact which probably accounted for the large measure of success which attended the opening days of this new stunt. A new departure was the absence of the prolonged preliminary bombardment which had preceded all the earlier battles in which the 56th Division, at any rate, had taken part. On this occasion the divisional front was only lightly held, the actual attack developing on each flank; our front line was principally manned by dummy figures with dummy tanks in attendance. The ruse succeeded admirably. On the flanks big advances were made, while in the 56th Division the "real" casualties were negligible though Fritz did great execution among the cardboard figures!

Unfortunately, the high hopes raised by the early successes of the battle rapidly gave place to grave fears of an impending disaster when on November 30th, the Germans, recovered from their surprise, counter-attacked with large forces. Such a possibility appeared not to have been reckoned with—at any rate reinforcements on any appreciable scale were not forthcoming—and a mere handful of hard-pressed British divisions had to withstand the onslaught of a—numerically—immensely superior enemy concentration. Our own battalions were hotly engaged and the London Scottish, Queen's Westminsters and other regiments suffered heavy casualties in making a wonderfully gallant stand against terrific odds. The bearers of the three ambulances, under the direction of Colonel Brebner, had a strenuous and exacting task, while at the M.D.S. the nursing staff were working day and night at high pressure. The reports of the battle itself were unusually meagre and conflicting, and indeed it was not until several weeks later that the true version of this abortive attempt to break through to Cambrai (the battle was known as the Cambrai attack) became known to those who, like ourselves, had been most intimately concerned in it.



Winter at Aubigny

ON December 3rd, our long stay at Beugny came to an end. Entraining at FREMICOURT we journeyed northwards again, and after a more than usually cold and unpleasant trip detrained in the afternoon at BEAUMETZ, whence a march of 5 kilometres brought us to WANQUETIN, where we remained two days. Though life at Beugny had been by no means unpleasant, the place had seemed very remote from civilization owing to the entire absence of any of its former inhabitants. Now we were once more among a civilian population, with cafés, shops and other indications that a more normal life was still to be found "behind the front." The first night at Wanquetin was a memorable one. The whole unit was in an unusually happy and hilarious mood—even the most staid among our numbers let themselves go on this occasion—and the big hut in which everyone was billeted resounded with laughter and mirth until far into the night.

On leaving Wanquetin, one night was spent at MONT ST. ELOI and the next day the ambulance moved on to AUBIGNY to take over the XIII Corps Rest Station. First impressions were most favourable. The camp was a large one—the largest in fact that the unit had met with—consisting of

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comfortable and well equipped huts. A splendid "theatre" with excellent stage and scenic effects put joy into the hearts of the concert party. It did not take long, however, to realise that running a camp of this size meant a tremendous amount of hard work for everyone concerned, with little spare time for recreation or amusement, particularly as the staff the unit was able to provide was not nearly large enough to cope with the number of patients the camp could contain. The weather turned bitterly cold and everyone became somewhat "fed-up." Time sped by, however, and our second Christmas in France passed uneventfully, though certainly not without due recognition. On Christmas Day the patients were fêted in the afternoon while the staff dined in the evening, the men being waited on in the camp dining hall by the sergeants. On Boxing Day a slight thaw with hopes of warmer weather cheered everyone up, but a hard frost soon set in again and was followed by a long spell of bright and clear but intensely cold days and wonderful moonlight nights, during which the country round looked very beautiful in its mantle of white.

Aubigny itself proved quite a pleasant town. It boasted several excellent cafés—the touchstone by which most French towns were either adjudged satisfactory or found wanting—and *recherché* little dinner parties after a hard day's work in the rest station became quite the mode. For these functions "Madame" of the café was the genius presiding over the cooking arrangements, and an opportunity was always made to drink to Madame herself and to "la belle France," Madame acknowledging both toasts with a beaming smile and a warmly responsive "Vive l'Angleterre."

The New Year brought information of the O.C. having been awarded the D.S.O. for the Cambrai "stunt" and a few days later the Divisional Commander, General Dudgeon*, visited the camp to present Colonel Brebner with his ribbon, and

* General Hull had been invalided home some months earlier. He subsequently rejoined the division.

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eleven members of the unit with the Military Medal ribbon for good work in the same "stunt."

One incident which occurred on New Year's Day, and which certainly ought not to go unrecorded, may here be mentioned. At 10 p.m. on that day a message was received by telephone from the A.D.M.S. asking to be supplied at once with cough mixture, a bottle of port and a tin of biscuits! No explanation was offered. Can anyone throw light on this strange request?!

The concert party ushered in 1918 with their new pantomime "The Babes in the Wood." Comparison was naturally made with "Dick Whittington" at La Gorgue, some thinking the new show better, others roundly declaring it not nearly as good. It only need be said here that it was a most successful production, playing nightly to crowded and always appreciative "houses." Tom Dewey and Leonard Ross as two robbers were gorgeously funny, and Andy Broom was excellent all through. As had been the case the previous year, Bob Wright was pressed into a leading part at the last minute but nevertheless acquitted himself remarkably well. Others deserving of mention were F. Beal and "Go" Ross as the babes, Sparkes (the Demon King), Fletcher ("Rubber"), Weeks, Levi and Johns to name only a few, but everyone was good. The very excellent scenery and stage effects were the work of a clever patient—a scene painter in civil life—who kindly gave his services and advice for the benefit of the show. Other patients gave willing help in various ways, thus materially contributing towards the smooth and successful running of the whole performance. After some weeks at Aubigny, the party went "on tour" to the Canadian Corps who were stationed in and around the neighbouring village of Cambigneul. Needless to say they gave the "Babes in the Wood" a most enthusiastic reception.

Football was much in vogue about this time. In the first round of the brigade cup competition we defeated the 8th

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Middlesex by one goal to nil. In the second round, after drawing 2—2 with the Edinburgh R.E. Field Company on our own ground, we unfortunately suffered a heavy defeat (0—4) in the replay at Ecurie. Another notable game was that against the 93rd Field Ambulance whose place we took at the C.R.S. They had a particularly strong side and a remarkable record of victorious games. Our team succeeded in effecting a draw. We also defeated the 42nd C.C.S. by three goals to one.

The second anniversary of the unit's arrival in France (February 22nd) was celebrated in fitting manner by a dinner followed by an impromptu concert towards which everyone present was asked and expected to contribute. The proceedings terminated very late, and the next morning . . . but no! it would hardly be fair to enlarge upon that!!

A few days later, rumours of an impending move began to circulate in the camp, one report mentioning 80 days' rest at Boulogne as our fate, others, Egypt, Italy, India and—nearer home—Ypres again. Actually, none of these destinations proved the correct one, for on March 4th the unit—or rather two sections—left Aubigny for MARCÉUIL and took over the divisional gas hospital there. Some 60 men were left behind to assist the incoming ambulance, the 2/1st West Riding, 62nd Division, in running the rest station. At the latter place things became very quiet, even monotonous, though the monotony was not too pleasantly relieved by one or two night visits from Bosche 'planes which dropped bombs in Aubigny but fortunately missed the camp. At Marœuil we were less fortunate, the camp there being on one occasion heavily shelled, with the result that four of our number lost their lives. The event was particularly tragic because of its total unexpectedness, Marœuil being several miles behind the line and generally quite immune from shell-fire.

Attack and Counter-Attack.

ON March 21st, 1918, the Germans launched their great offensive. We were apprised of their early successes by refreshingly candid "wires" posted up at frequent intervals on the camp notice board (this was a new departure—very different from the hush-hush policy hitherto in force) but everyone seemed supremely confident that "Fritz" would be held. Events began to move rapidly. At Aubigny the West Riding Field Ambulance gave place to our friends the 2/3rds (London) and a few days later the 2/1st party also left Aubigny, and rejoined their own unit who had quitted Marœuil and taken over a new M.D.S. at ST. CATHERINE, a suburb of Arras.

On March 28th, the Germans made their second big effort to break through, this time on our front, their object being to take Arras and drive a wedge between the northern and southern portions of the British Army. The most desperate efforts were made with immensely strong forces to secure a decision at this point, wave upon wave of troops being poured into the attack, but the 56th and two other divisions held firm and resisted all the enemy's attempts to pierce the line. In so doing they undoubtedly played a big part in one of the most crucial engagements of the whole war, it being generally recognised that a German break-through at Arras would have been attended by the most far reaching and possibly disastrous consequences to the Allies.

Casualties on our side were naturally severe and the bearers had a very hard time, added to which was the new and decidedly unpleasant experience of being all but surrounded and captured by the enemy—one of our number, Watson, did in fact suffer this fate and was condemned to spend the rest of the war in Germany. The 2/2nds were even more unfortunate, eight men and one N.C.O. all being taken prisoners. Happily our unit had no actual casualties.

On the following day we were relieved by a Canadian field

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ambulance and moved out to Marœuil and, after two days there, to VILLERS-AU-BOIS behind Vimy for a week's rest. This was a Canadian area and we had an opportunity of seeing and admiring the manner in which the Dominion troops were looked after, when out of the line, in the way of amusements and recreation. There was a splendid Y.M.C.A. canteen and concert hall in which the 3rd Canadian divisional concert party, "The Dumb-Bells," performed nightly for the benefit of enthusiastic audiences. The enthusiasm was well merited for it was a splendid show in which musical talent was particularly prominent.

On April 6th, the unit moved again at very short notice, the transport to BERNAVILLE and the company to DAINVILLE, where, curiously enough, parties had been stationed a year and two years previously almost to the day in each case. April 9th proved to be a tragic day for the unit—the saddest we had experienced since our arrival in France and one whose events cast a gloom over everybody. One of a number of high velocity shells fired into Dainville by enemy long range guns hit a building in which several men were sitting, killing five and seriously wounding eleven others. Daly, Tom Dewey, Ronnie Robertson and Weeks were killed instantaneously and Egerton died within an hour or so from his wounds. The whole affair happened so unexpectedly and with such tragic suddenness that it seemed almost impossible to realise. Poor Tom Dewey, whom everyone had liked and who had given us so many hours of laughter with his whimsical ways, his funny face and his agile dancing and clever fooling—it seemed incredible that we should never again chuckle with enjoyment at his antics. Daly, Egerton and Weeks had all been leading lights in the concert party, and Ronnie Robertson with all his strange and sometimes difficult ways had been generally popular and well-liked and their loss was deeply mourned by all. They were laid to rest side by side in the cemetery at Dainville on the following day, when a large contingent of the

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unit assembled to pay a last silent tribute to the memory of five of the very best of companions and friends.

On the evening of the 9th, headquarters were transferred to WAGONLIEU, a party of bearers only remaining at Dainville—in the comparative safety of some deep caves beneath the church, some distance removed from the scene of the tragedy of the afternoon. A day or two later H.Q. moved to the BRIQUETERIE, a camp situated on a rise between Warlus and Wanquetin, and thither the bearers shortly afterwards returned.

Fatigues became the order of the day and in a very short space of time the erection of several huts, a dining room and baths were evidence of a transformed and now commodious and workmanlike camp.

The division had meanwhile taken over additional front and the ambulance was consequently required to run certain posts in the line. The A.D.S. was at St. Sauveur's, a large building which in time of peace had presumably been a convent school, situated a short distance beyond the railway station at Arras. It had suffered considerably from shell fire but, like most similar buildings in France, contained extensive cellar space which the A.D.S. party was able to inhabit, and as the cellars were both well ventilated and lighted there was little or no discomfort in being compelled thus to live underground.

St. Saviour's, to give it the English name by which it was generally known in the unit, contained some curious relics of pre-war days, including two much battered pianos, one with no notes remaining at all! A third, however, was in quite good condition and was frequently made use of to accompany the impromptu dances and sing-songs which were held from time to time. Another feature of the building was the large number of mirrors—it had evidently been a girls' school!—of every conceivable size and shape which adorned the walls.

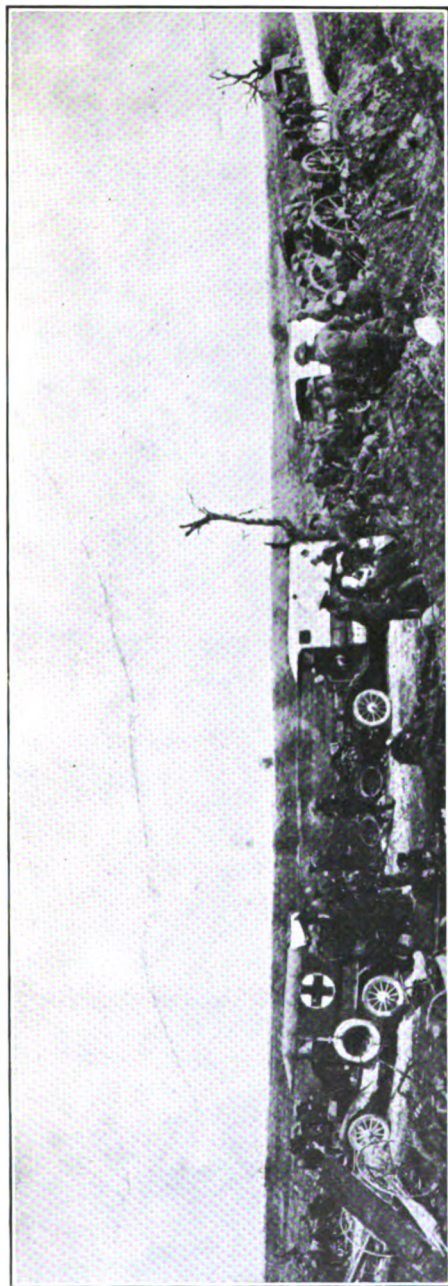
Out of the line, life at this time was by no means unpleasant. At St. Saviour's one could sit with safety above ground in the

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pleasant garden, reading and listening to the birds pouring forth their song quite regardless of the war and its accompaniment of destruction and desolation only a short mile or so away. Nature, too, seemed supremely indifferent to the general environment, and the trees began to take on a wonderful green, and lilac bushes scented all the air with their fragrance.

An "Amusements" Committee was formed at the A.D.S. for the purpose of organising various forms of indoor entertainment to relieve the monotony of an otherwise uneventful existence, and under its auspices several most successful functions were arranged. Among these were two whist drives, a fancy dress dance, a blind boxing competition, a debate on the influence of Horatio Bottomley and a mock trial. The latter was a "terrific" success—no other word adequately describes it. Major Johnstone, as the judge, simply brought the house down. He appeared in court—to the huge delight of everyone present—fully attired in wig and gown, spectacles on nose, and with even his face made up for the occasion. His summing up of the case (which involved the trial of Roy Braby for driving a motor car at a dangerously high speed in Piccadilly Circus, and incidentally knocking down a famous music hall comedienne and thereby damaging her reputation!), if not judicially sound was nevertheless entirely satisfactory to the counsel, jury and witnesses and to the onlookers who thronged the court, and it occasioned repeated shouts of laughter. Mr. Baggott, as a witness, also enlivened the proceedings by working off in the course of his evidence some highly irreverent but decidedly amusing sallies at the expense of the A.D.M.S. which, needless to say, were much appreciated. Altogether a remarkably successful evening.

In addition to the party at St. Saviour's, posts had to be maintained nearer the line. At these posts—Tilloy and Cemetery by name—two or three squads of bearers were stationed, and from these again 24-hour relays were supplied to the regi-



DRESSING STATION SCENE AT GUILLEMONT (Official War Photograph.)

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mental aid posts. Casualties were fortunately very few in number, and life at the posts, if somewhat confined and more monotonous than at the A.D.S., was certainly not arduous. In Arras a further bearer post was established at the "Ecole de jeunes filles," and thus a series of relays was established between headquarters and the line.

Arras, in this month of May, 1918, was a slumbering city, and presented a strange and forlorn appearance to any who had occasion to pass through its streets. These streets, which a year before had been full of troops and all the many and varied signs of active battle near at hand, were now almost entirely deserted. A few civilians—mostly women—might very infrequently be seen hurrying along in the shelter of the empty houses, whose closed and barred shutters accentuated the mournfulness of the streets, but other signs of life there were none. And those women—how came they to be in Arras at all at such a time? It could only be because they preferred to risk death rather than leave their homes. One could not but admire and silently wonder at the frequent manifestations here and elsewhere of the extraordinary attachment to their homes which these French people showed. Did a shell bring down all the tiles from the roof of his humble dwelling, the owner—generally an old and wizened man, sometimes even it was an old woman—would appear with a ladder and set to work patiently to repair the damage, seemingly not reckoning on the probability of a similar or worse fate befalling the fragile abode within the space of another day or even sooner. Were a building evacuated by our troops as being too dangerous for occupation, the lonely inhabitants merely smiled—and remained! Was it love of home, was it a sense of fear of what might be in store for them elsewhere, or was it merely fatalism that made these people stick so tenaciously to their own hearths? The question seemed unanswerable with any degree of certainty. A French girl of 18 or 19 years was brought into our hospital badly wounded by an enemy shell. Her last

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words before she died were addressed to the Colonel, who was standing by; they were, "C'est la guerre, Monsieur." One could only marvel at the spirit which prompted such an utterance.

At the Briqueterie life proceeded as uneventfully as at the A.D.S., with the additional advantage that it was not necessary to confine activities to below ground, and it was therefore possible to take full advantage of the long spell of perfect summer weather which now intervened. Cricket and ring badminton were the order of the day, with visits to the Bow Bells at Warlus in the evening. Daily bathing parties to the swimming pool at Gouves were also very popular. The only fly in the ointment was an outbreak of influenza, which rapidly assumed—numerically—alarming proportions. Fortunately, those affected quickly recovered, and in no case were the results serious.

May and June passed, and still the division remained out of the heavy fighting that was raging on other parts of the front. We were indeed fortunate and fully realised our good luck, though it seemed too much to expect that it would last. With the advent of July rumours of an impending move began to circulate, and on the 15th the unit was once more on the march. Apart from the uncertainty as to our next destination much regret was felt at leaving the Briqueterie camp, which had been made very comfortable and pleasant during our stay and which we were accordingly loth to hand over to strangers. Our good fortune did not immediately desert us, however, the direction of our march being still away from and not towards the line, and our first resting-place a pleasant little village named HOUVELIN, situated between St. Pol and Houdain. It was a wicked march though, and proved almost too much for a good many, especially as we had done no long marches for months past and were consequently not in the best of form.

Houvelin was a charming spot nestling down in a hollow, with a stream flowing close by, and with pleasant inhabitants,

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clean cafés, and an unlimited supply of fresh milk and new-laid eggs for those who valued such material solaces in time of war ! Everyone hoped for a long stay, but it was not to be, and within three days we were en route again, this time to GOUY-SERVINS, a small town north of Vimy. The chief feature of the place was an imposing if somewhat bare and unattractive chateau, which occupied a commanding position at one end of a large rectangular open space and was flanked on one side by a huge granary in which the whole unit was easily accommodated, and on the other by a series of stables and out-houses.

There seemed to be a big concentration of troops in and around the village, a fact which pointed ominously to the probability of a big "do" in the near future. Meanwhile, however, our "rest" continued, and with the weather remaining fine there was ample opportunity for cricket and sports of all descriptions, including baseball and, though perhaps hardly coming within the category of a "sport," crown-and-anchor, both these latter pastimes being purveyed—principally—by the Canadians, in whose area Gouy was situated.

Mention may just be made of the fact that during our stay at Gouy we were able to see "The Volatiles," the concert party of the 1st Canadian Division, and a truly wonderful show they presented in the form of a revue based on "The Passing Show." The "leading lady" was particularly brilliant; many voted "her" quite the best we had seen in France. Certainly everyone who witnessed the Volatiles' performance was agreed that the Bow Bells would need to look to their laurels.

Our stay at Gouy was not without its unpleasant incidents, the chief of which was a nocturnal visit from several Bosche 'planes which dropped a large number of bombs in and around the village and inflicted nearly 150 casualties. No one in the ambulance suffered, but our "granary" had a very narrow escape, a huge torpedo-bomb falling sufficiently near to bring down a plentiful supply of dust and plaster and to cause, not unnaturally, rather acute "wind-up."

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To everyone's unconcealed satisfaction, and quite contrary to all expectations, on leaving Gouy-Servins we returned once more to the Briqueterie at Wanquetin from which we had set forth a fortnight earlier. A regrettable incident occurred on the march, the unit's mascot, "Fritz," who had been with us since La Gorgue days, being run over and killed by a lorry. There had been much speculation as to whether he would one day return with the ambulance to England, and if so to whom he would belong, though in the matter of his ownership Jerry Morgan was generally regarded as having established a very strong claim.

The next two or three weeks at the Briqueterie passed uneventfully, although fierce fighting continued further south, where our armies were slowly but surely beginning to gain the ascendancy once more. The news was good, and once again many of us fancied it really was the beginning of the end, and that the Germans had made their supreme and final effort—and failed. We seemed curiously out of these momentous happenings, but like good soldiers remained quite contented and did not sigh for new worlds to conquer!

On August 17th the unit moved once more, this time to HOUVIN-HOUVIGNEUL, a pleasant little village lying amidst lovely woods, not far from Frévent, and thus in the neighbourhood of several places we had known two years earlier. From Houvin we moved to DENIER, at which place a party was detailed and despatched for duty to a C.C.S., a sure sign this of an impending "stunt." And so it proved, the rest of the unit departing the following day for LA CAUCHIE. From there squads were sent to the various battalions, and the remaining bearers went up, under Mr. Dukes, to the A.D.S. of one of the 59th Division field ambulances at Ficheux. The following morning the 56th Division attacked, and wounded soon began to arrive from the line in large numbers. They were, however, mostly walking cases, and the bearers had not actually a great deal to do. Indeed, from their point of view

ATTACK AND COUNTER-ATTACK.

the "attack" was decidedly tame. The A.D.S. seemed more like a dressing station during manœuvres in peace time. No shells fell near, and the work of attending to the wounded was carried on in the open. Planes flew overhead at intervals and the guns roared incessantly, but as the day proceeded reports came in of an advance of 8 or 9 kilometres, and this made the work at the A.D.S. seem even more of a "side-show" than had been the case in the morning. On the following day, however, the bearers moved up and joined the 2/3rds, who had established a new A.D.S. in a sunken road which 24 hours previously had been part of the German line. Stretcher squads were left at various points to establish relays, and others pushed on to BOYELLES, on the Arras-Bapaume road. Signs were clearly visible of the Germans having retreated in a great hurry, and the litter left behind was almost indescribable. Equipment of all sorts had been hastily thrown aside, and there were to be seen such widely varying articles as loaves of rye bread, German newspapers, photographs, letters, pocket-knives, watches and a hundred and one other oddments dear to the heart of the souvenir hunter if any of those misguided enthusiasts were still to be found in this the fourth year of war! One newspaper advertised performances in some distant German home town of "Mr. Wu" and "The Waltz Dream"!

The advance proceeded rapidly and gave little opportunity to the bearers of forming any deep or lasting attachment to particular bivouacs or dug-outs, for no sooner had a squad found a new and comparatively comfortable abode and begun to congratulate themselves on their good fortune than the order would come to press on. This continual moving forward and the distribution of the bearers in small parties over a large area, which extended still more as the most advanced squads became more and more remote from their base, make any connected account of the unit's part in the operations practically impossible. It may just be said, therefore, that in the last week of August, 1918, CROISILLES was captured and the line

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advanced right up to BULLECOURT. Boyelles and Ficheux already seemed far behind the line, and the latter was, in fact, used as a rest post to which the bearers returned for 24 or 48-hour reliefs.

In the meantime "headquarters" had not been by any means idle, and had, indeed, experienced almost as many moves as the bearer section. From La Cauchie they went to SAULTY for one day, then on to BAC-DU-SUD on the Arras-Doullens road, where the Corps M.D.S. was taken over from the Guards' Division field ambulance. After three days here a further move was made, first to BAILLEULVAL, the following day to BLAIRVILLE, and on August 31st to BOISLEUX, where a new camp was established to which a day later the bearers, who during the stunt had been attached to the 2/3rds, returned in the hope of securing a few days' well-earned rest.

The division had done fine work during the advance and captured much ground, including the very important Bullecourt position which, taken after very severe fighting and heavy losses, was then lost again but was finally re-taken and held. The unit had again been fortunate in not sustaining heavier casualties, but had not entirely escaped, Ilott having been killed at Bullecourt and three others wounded or gassed. Ilott was, in point of service, one of the oldest members of the unit, and the general sense of loss caused by his death was feelingly expressed by the presence at the burial of their comrade of a large number of both officers and men.

“The Hospital St. Jean”

CONTRARY to expectations, the ambulance was not called upon to go into the line again, and after a week's welcome rest at BOISLEUX-AU-MONT we marched into ARRAS once more to take over the hospital St. Jean. With the continually changing front and the large number of divisions engaged, the hospital became a clearing house for the wounded of units all and sundry, and everyone was accordingly kept busy.

Night bombing was being increasingly indulged in by both sides about this time, and we had one particularly bad night when “Fritz” dropped bombs on the railway station at Arras, where a whole brigade of Canadian troops were waiting to entrain. Wounded poured in to the hospital throughout the night.

In spite of pressure of work during this month of September there were occasional opportunities for diversion, chief amongst which were visits to the neighbouring swimming pool. Inter-sectional contests and a gala were held and also an inter-unit race with the 2/3rds, which was won easily by our representatives.

In the meantime events were moving rapidly in the world outside—one uses the word “outside” for somehow we, who were in reality so close to the main events, yet seemed, owing to the necessity for concentrating on our own particular share in these events, to be far removed from the actual centre of activities and to know next to nothing of the general train of happenings in the great struggle. On September 30th we heard the startling news that Bulgaria had surrendered unconditionally, and shortly afterwards came the Central Powers' preliminary request for an armistice. These sensational occurrences did not, however, immediately affect the general military operations. The offensive proceeded, and the 56th Division, still in action, was by this time far advanced from Arras. In fact, the hospital was not less than 30 kilometres distant from

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the divisional front, although, owing to a curious salient in the line north of Arras, the Germans were still occupying ground beyond Oppy, not more than 10 kilometres from the city. Cambrai was the critical point, the retention of which meant so much to the enemy, and some of the fiercest fighting of the whole war took place during the month of October in the struggle for possession of this important centre. The British losses were tragically heavy before Cambrai finally fell and the Germans were forced to withdraw their whole line, thus finally freeing Arras from the incessant shell-fire to which it had been subjected during more than four years of war.

Before recounting the unit's final movements, which only ceased with the signing of the Armistice, some reference is due to another experience—for many the most tragic in its pathos of all the episodes in our period of active service—which fell to our lot at the hospital St. Jean.

The rapid advance of the British armies into territory which for more than four years had been under German rule liberated large numbers of civilians who had undergone every kind of suffering and privation, either wantonly inflicted by the Germans, or in many, perhaps the majority of cases, the natural, but not on that account any the more easily endured, results of so long being forced to live under the conditions inseparable from a foreign and hostile occupation. Lack of food often amounting to starvation, confinement to cellars and underground modes of living and absence of medical attention, had wrought havoc among these poor unfortunate people. And now freedom had suddenly come to them.

At no more than a day's notice the unit had to make ready to receive literally hundreds of these civilians—sick and ill of both sexes and of all ages, from the tiniest infants to old men and women who were too feeble even to lift a finger for themselves. A fully equipped hospital with every modern comfort and convenience would have been hard put to it to cope with this sudden influx, and here were we, a field ambulance, with

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the merest skeleton of the necessary equipment and medical and surgical resources, suddenly called upon to undertake this enormous task. It can be said without hesitation that everyone concerned responded magnificently to the piteous appeal presented by the spectacle of these poor maimed and suffering refugees, and the manner in which the work was tackled and the hospital organised for the task was undoubtedly one of the finest things ever accomplished by the 2/1st. Certainly never did the nursing staff work harder. Many of the patients, both adults and children, were in a pitiable and deplorable condition with gangrenous wounds, dirt-infested and ill and feeble to a degree. Many were past hope of recovery, and death came as a merciful relief. Others had still sufficient strength left to keep a hold on life and to struggle slowly back to health. All were profoundly and touchingly grateful for what was done for them, and those who were strong enough to do so rendered invaluable assistance in the wards in helping to tend their weaker comrades. The language barrier added to the difficulties with which all but those few in the ambulance who spoke French were faced in dealing with the situation, and the services of an official interpreter and several unofficial ones were in constant demand.

Each day brought further convoys of patients, but after the first sudden rush had been met order began to be restored and the cases classified. Yet even so the task of tending so many and varied cases continued to tax the unit's organisation to its utmost and kept everyone working at high pressure throughout.

The foregoing is merely an outline of one of the most remarkable fortnights in the unit's history. Pages might be written around the happenings of that time, but those who witnessed them, and still more those who took an active part in them, are never likely to forget the tragic and terrible sights in those improvised wards at St. Jean and at the Schram barracks, sights far more terrible in a sense than those of actual

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battle scenes, because in the latter one had to harden one's heart to the death of men—even of one's own friends and comrades—whereas in the former case old men, women and children who ought never to have been part of such a tragedy were involved. Even the strongest among our numbers soon bore signs of the strain that the work imposed upon their energies and nerves, and it is no reflection on the courage and willingness of the unit to say that everyone was profoundly thankful when we were able to hand over the task to No. 7 C.C.S. The ambulance was congratulated on all sides for its excellent efforts during this fortnight, not least among the expressions of gratitude for the work accomplished being the warm thanks of the French Government, which was given expression to subsequently by the award to Sergeant-Major Smith of the French “*médaille des épidémies*.”

The refugee work was not allowed to interfere with the ambulance's normal duty of receiving and treating sick among the troops, although wounded were for the time being evacuated through other channels than the hospital St. Jean. One story in connection with the daily sick parade is perhaps worth preserving. The officer on duty was Lieutenant Dukes, of the United States Army, who was attached to the unit for instruction and had rapidly become very popular by reason of his frank and pleasant manner and, it must be added, his highly unconventional behaviour and lack of respect for those in high places!

Enter a Tommy, very down on his luck, feeling and looking ill and miserable as the result of a somewhat severe attack of that baneful complaint “P.U.O.” To him, Mr. Dukes, in the broadest American:—

“Waal, body, what's wrong with you?”

Unhappy Tommy: “Don't know, Sir; feeling shivery all over and a splittin' head, feeling sort of tired, Sir.”

Mr. D.: “Tired, body, tired; put it right there (holding



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out the right hand of fellowship). I guess that's been my complaint ever since I began this trip!"

Other stories might be told of Mr. Dukes, particularly—but, no! one further "gentle" one must suffice.

Scene: the officers' mess; time, 9 p.m.; Mr. Dukes taking a well-earned rest after a strenuous day on duty as orderly officer. Enter an orderly with the following message: "Please, Sir, the interpreter wants to know if he can have a Talbot car to take him down to St. Pol."

Mr. Dukes: "Oh, he does, does he? Waal, I guess he can't. Give him a Ford, or let him 'lorry-jump' down to St. Pol, the same as you or I would have to do."

Orderly, departing, "Yes, Sir."

Mr. D., with a sudden inspiration: "Say, body, this interpreter guy isn't by any chance the one who scrounged those two cases of champagne for the officers' mess, is he?"

Orderly: "Yes, Sir."

Mr. D.: "Oh, that alters the case, I guess. Give him *two* Talbots."



The Final Phase.

ON November 6th the unit bade farewell to the hospital St. Jean and departed by 'bus to rejoin the division, which, as has been stated, was already far removed from Arras and daily advancing further in pursuit of the now rapidly retreating Germany army. The 'buses conveyed us through CAMBRAI and beyond to the village of DOUCHY, where the division was reassembling. The transport followed by road and caught up the main body at Douchy two days later. Shortly afterwards the division was again in action at Thiant, from which place it pushed forward to the village of Famars, in the direction of Valenciennes. The ambulance's task was to push forward simultaneously with, and just in rear of the infantry, and to this end the O.C. went on ahead with a mobile party, leaving the transport and other details to follow behind and to maintain contact as well as possible. Casualties were not severe, but arrangements had to be made for the reception, treatment and evacuation of such as did occur, and temporary dressing stations were accordingly established (and as hastily evacuated again when the unit moved forward) at each point on the line of march.

In this way **THIANT, MAING, FAMARS, AULNOY** and **SAULTAIN** were each in turn occupied for short periods and then left, and eventually **SEBOURG** was reached. From this point the enemy retreat became almost a rout, our "front

THE FINAL PHASE.

line " actually marching in " column of fours " along the main roads, while the cavalry maintained connection with the enemy's rear. It must not be imagined, however, that the attackers sustained no losses at all. This was far from being the case, and the unit did not escape unscathed, three bearers (Lance-Corporal Hield, Farrow and Jevons) losing their lives during this period. These were the last casualties sustained by the ambulance, and the death of three of our number a day or so only before the " cease fire " sounded was particularly tragic. The complete record of those who gave their lives during our three years' overseas appears at the end of this book. It may here be mentioned that, in addition, 53 were wounded, one (Bolton) on three separate occasions, and five others twice. A great many more left the unit from time to time owing to sickness, in order to take commissions and for various other causes, their places being filled by reinforcements. In all, certainly not fewer than 600 officers and men served in the ambulance between 1914 and 1919.

The rapidity of the advance rendered the maintenance of communications extraordinarily difficult, and, had it not been for the certain knowledge that the Germans were almost at breaking-point, the spreading out of our forces in this manner would have been a highly dangerous proceeding. Transport difficulties were multiplied by the action of the enemy in mining every possible bridge and cross-roads, thus frequently causing considerable delay and almost inconceivable congestion among the many varieties of vehicle—guns, limbers, motor ambulances, staff cars, ration wagons and others—which all had their part to play in this, the culminating episode of the gigantic drama of 1914-1918.

Fortunately, most of the villages through which the sweeping tide advanced were little if at all damaged by shell fire, and the inhabitants rendered great assistance by filling in the craters caused by mines at the cross-roads and elsewhere as soon as the last of the enemy troops had retired.

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The unit reached ERQUENNES on November 9th, and QUEVY-LE-PETIT at 5 p.m. on the following day. This last trek was rendered noteworthy by the Brigade-Major riding along the column on the march and shouting to the men : " The Kaiser has abdicated, and Little Willie won't take the job on," an announcement which was greeted with tremendous cheers.

That night the barn in which the main body of the unit was billeted, and in another part of which the transport's horses were stabled, caught fire, and was almost burnt out before the flames were finally subdued. Several men had narrow escapes, and seven horses could not be rescued in time and were burned to death.

The next morning the Armistice was signed.

“ Apres la Guerre Finie.”

WELL, it was all over ! The guns had kept up a brisk fire until 11 a.m. and then came silence. The day, the hour for which we had hoped and prayed for four and a half long years, and which sometimes during the later years had seemed a wild impossible dream that never could be realised, had come at last. What were our feelings? At first bewilderment, inability almost to realise what had happened. And then . . . not the scenes of wild excitement, the delirium of joy that pervaded the streets of London and were shared in by some of our number who were fortunate enough to be home on leave on that never-to-be-forgotten day . . . but a strangely mixed feeling of indescribable relief combined with a sudden realisation of an intense and almost overpowering weariness, as though, the opportunity having come at last to cast off from one's shoulders some gigantic burden which had become too heavy to be borne, one were left without even sufficient strength to take that sole remaining step necessary to secure freedom.

Life did indeed seem strange in those first few weeks following the Armistice. But war inculcated in men's minds and habits more than anything else the power of adaptability to all sorts and conditions of living, and we soon settled down to this new peaceful state of affairs and forgot to be surprised at the absence of shell and rifle fire by day and the dropping of bombs at night as completely as we had previously become accustomed to their disturbing presence.

Quévy-le-petit was a quiet and unpretentious little Belgian village in which the days and weeks passed by uneventfully enough. Headquarters were situated in and about the village school, and the unit was billeted in the houses up and down the main street. The civilian people were friendly and kind and did all they could to make us comfortable. The absence of any shops was compensated for by the canteen, which flourished exceedingly under the able management of Wells and “Dicky”

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Bird, and by the two or three cafés wherein one could sit and wile away many a pleasant half-hour or longer chatting to Madeleine or Claire or even, in their absence, to Madame (!) and listening to stories of the war and the German occupation or discussing the problems and possibilities of peace.

This was the first time since our very early days at St. Ouen that we had been in civilian billets, and we much appreciated the amenities they provided, such as chairs, tables, fire-places, electric light, and even in some instances proper beds, none of which, of course, was a usual accompaniment of barn or bivouac life. We enjoyed still more the abolition of an early morning staff parade and the new luxury of merely having to roll out of blankets in time for breakfast. Wounded had no longer to be ministered to, but occasional sick still required attention, and for this purpose a small hospital was kept going which provided work for some. For the remainder, fatigues were the usual occupation, but no one showed an inordinate zeal for work, and duties generally were, to say the least, not unduly exacting.

For entertainment it was necessary to go into Mons, which could be reached easily by tram or, by the more energetic ones, on foot, the distance not being greater than 9 or 10 kilometres. Mons proved to be a good-sized town with excellent shops, whose prices, however, were decidedly "steep." It boasted a theatre, two or three cinemas and numerous cafés, and Sunday afternoon trips from Quévy rapidly became a very popular form of diversion in an otherwise somewhat monotonous existence. The Bow Bells resuscitated their La Gorgue pantomime "Aladdin," and our friends the 2/3rds also produced a most excellent show, written by two of their number, entitled "The Magic Carpet," which drew crowded houses from among the many troops situated in and around Mons.

A good football ground was secured at Quévy, and the unit team played several matches against other teams, while in addition there were almost daily "pick-up" games among our

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own ranks. In the divisional cup competition we successfully negotiated the first and second rounds but succumbed in the third. Thereafter we followed with interest the doings of the 2/3rds, who had a splendid team (including Dr. Paterson, who since the war has played regularly in first league football for the Arsenal) which took them into the final, when they had to admit defeat from the 5th Batt. Cheshire Regiment, who carried off the cup for the second time.

Rugger was also revived, and a divisional team, for which Captain Stephenson and Corporal Turner (M.T.A.S.C.) turned out regularly, played several matches; while in the inter-unit divisional cup competition the R.A.M.C. team, recruited from the three ambulances and the A.D.M.S. staff, succeeded in reaching the final but were then defeated by the 280th Army Brigade, R.F.A.

After the Armistice everyone's thoughts turned in the direction of demobilisation. Curiously enough and, as he explained in his farewell speech, entirely by chance, Colonel Brebner was the first to go—about the middle of December. Major Rice-Oxley then became Lieut.-Colonel and took command of the unit. Colonel Brebner had the satisfaction of having commanded the unit without a break from its original formation until after the Armistice, a record not approached in either of the other ambulances of the division, both of which had experienced several changes among their commanding officers. Colonel Rice-Oxley, who was the only other officer to serve with the ambulance from its arrival in France until the Armistice, left shortly afterwards, the command then passing to Major Johnstone. He was in turn succeeded by Major Hare, who vacated the post of D.A.D.M.S., which he had held for some considerable period, to be promoted to Lieut.-Colonel in command of the ambulance.

Not unnaturally, the perils of war being past, December 25th, 1918, proved the most enjoyable and light-hearted of the three Christmases we had been destined to spend overseas.

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The day itself was fine and frosty, a welcome change after a lengthy spell of execrable weather. In the morning we played and drew (3—3) an exciting "soccer" match with our old opponents, the Edinburgh R.E.'s. The afternoon was spent under the S.M.'s direction in decorating the village school-room, where at 6 p.m. officers and men sat down together to an excellent dinner served by the sergeants, who were ably assisted by the belles of the village. After dinner the tables were cleared, and various members of the unit contributed to an impromptu concert. The flowing bowl was much in evidence and was supplemented by one of the S.M.'s extra special rum punches (sometimes known, under less auspicious circumstances, as "a little drop of Dutch courage"). It goes without saying that the party was a very merry one and that laughter and song abounded. Following the concert, speeches were made by the O.C. (Colonel Rice-Oxley), who thanked the ladies for their kindness in being present and helping with the dinner arrangements, and by Major Johnstone, who was in a most sparkling mood and brought the house down with his witticisms (one that comes to mind which caused loud laughter was—apropos of the perils of war being no longer with us—that it was much better to be a live donkey than a dead duke!) Someone next jumped on to a table and called for three cheers for the S.M., which were thunderously accorded and evoked a speech from the recipient. Each of the speakers was greeted with cheers and toasted with musical honours, and the gathering closed with everyone rising and singing lustily the national anthems of Belgium, France and England. The celebrations continued unofficially in billets and cafés until long after midnight, and the day was generally voted one of the jolliest in the unit's history.

A Boxing Day entry from a private diary was brief but significant. It read: "Très fatigué—nothing doing!!"

Echoes of the festivities lingered for several days, and various billets held semi-farewell dinners and receptions, it

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being generally felt that events would move quickly in the New Year and that there would not be many more opportunities for such gatherings. And so it proved, for, with the advent of 1919, demobilisation among the "other ranks" followed rapidly, the unit soon began to appear very depleted, and it must be confessed that competition was not lacking in keenness to avoid the rather doubtful satisfaction of remaining until the final "winding up."

With the cessation of active warfare, time hung somewhat heavily on everybody's hands, and to meet this situation educational classes had been started throughout the army. The ambulance soon had several flourishing classes in existence, and though the cynic may have observed that the enthusiasm, with which, on the morning parade, those men attending classes received the order "dismiss," was due more to the desire to avoid fatigues than to real zeal for learning, the fact remains that many in the unit did welcome the opportunity of renewing acquaintance with such almost forgotten subjects as book-keeping and shorthand, while others began in real earnest to study the intricacies of the French language. And it is equally true to say that the progress made, under the able guidance of Boswell, May, Wells and others, was in many cases remarkable, and bore tribute to the energy and enthusiasm of both learners and instructors.

The possibility of a unit magazine had often been discussed in earlier years, but "censorial" and other difficulties had prevented such an effort from becoming an accomplished fact. With the end of the war in sight, however, a divisional magazine had been launched. Unfortunately, not more than two numbers saw the light of day. The two that did appear were full of promise, and the unit was well represented in each. A competition throughout the division for the best cover design resulted in Lance-Corporal Wratten's effort being adjudged an easy winner, and when the first number of "The Dagger" appeared (the magazine received its title from the familiar sign

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by which the 56th Division was always to be recognised) the beautiful scroll design—incorporating the badges of all the regiments and formations in the division—was voted quite an outstanding feature. The first number also contained a charmingly fanciful poem by Jocelyn Read, while number two was graced by three very attractive pen-and-ink sketches of Paris drawn by Thirtle.

Towards the end of January the S.M.'s turn for demobilisation came round. The evening before his departure was made the occasion of a very pleasing ceremony at which a farewell presentation was made to him by the men of the unit. The decision thus to mark their sense of regard and affection for the S.M. and the carrying out of the idea had been kept very quiet, and until an hour or so before the actual presentation the recipient knew nothing of the proposal. It was felt best by those who had organised the matter to ask him to what use he would wish the sum of money collected to be put, and he chose without hesitation a bicycle. As that useful commodity was not to be bought in Quévy-le-Petit (!), the S.M. was asked to accept the money gift and to purchase the bicycle for himself on his return to England. This he promised to do, and in a feeling little speech expressed his thanks for the gift and the good feelings which had prompted its bestowal. Three rousing cheers and the singing of "For he's a jolly good fellow" brought a happy little ceremony to a close.

February came and went, and with the advent of March rumours of an impending move began to circulate. By this time demobilisation and the detaching of a party to No. 1 C.C.S. at Mons had reduced the Quévy contingent to a very small band, so that it seemed possible that we might soon achieve our object of going home as a unit. But the powers decided otherwise, and towards the middle of March the order came to leave Quévy and to move to MONS. The prospect was an unwelcome one, for we had become attached to and settled in our existing surroundings and did not relish the pos-



HEBUTERNE. THE COURTYARD OF A.D.S.

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sibility of decidedly less comfortable quarters in Mons. The move took place and our fears were more than confirmed, for not only were the new billets draughty and uncomfortable but we underwent the added indignity of having to work once more instead of continuing to live a life of ease. A large party was detailed off to the railway station, their duties consisting of keeping boiler fires going day and night for the provision of hot food and drink to troops passing through on their way home from the Rhine and other parts of the British zone. To us, who had been abroad for more than three years, and were longing to get home ourselves, this did indeed go against the grain, and loud were the murmurs of disapproval of the new work we had been called upon to perform.

This work continued for some weeks, at the end of which the unit moved to JEMAPPES, a small mining town about four kilometres from Mons. Life again became less strenuous, in fact official duties were almost nil, and the days were mostly spent in playing football and in such other forms of amusement as Jemappes provided, or in visits to Mons and Brussels.

On Sunday, May 18th, amid great rejoicing, the cadre, now reduced to less than 40 strong, entrained for ANTWERP, arriving there the following morning. Four quite enjoyable days were spent at Antwerp, and then came the order to embark for home. Tilbury was reached on the morning of May 23rd, and in the evening a further move was made to PURFLEET CAMP. On the following day we left Purfleet for NEWHAVEN. Two days later (May 27th) the unit was finally disbanded and the remnant proceeded to the Crystal Palace, where they were demobilised.

The last that was seen of the 2/1st was "Go" Ross, mournfully guarding a mountain of equipment left behind at Newhaven!

The Transport and some Others.

THESE pages would not be complete without some further acknowledgment of the part played in the work of the ambulance by those whose duties did not involve the actual care of sick and wounded, but who nevertheless formed an integral part of the unit.

First among these may be mentioned the H.T.'s (Horse Transport). It is a popular belief—which perhaps does rather less than justice to the horse—that any man who has the care of that noble animal must be able to and, in fact, always can swear hard! Our H.T.'s will not think it unkind if no attempt is here made to absolve them from the implied charge. They could—good and strong! Even “Cupid” had an almost unlimited vocabulary, and as for George—well, 'nuff said! But they were good fellows all, keen to maintain the unit's good name and never failing to pull their weight when things were unpleasant and the “Company” was having a bad time, while when things were quiet there was no smarter transport “turn-out” in the division than the 2/1st.

Recruited originally into the R.A.M.C., they were subsequently transferred *en bloc* to the A.S.C., their status as a definite part of the unit nevertheless remaining unchanged. In England, particularly in the early days, the horses, wagons and equipment of the transport were a somewhat medley assortment, and it was very much a case of go-as-you-please. Only a few of the men understood horses at all, and it fell to one or two—among them G—to drive all and sundry types of vehicles from the big horse ambulances to the cook's limber. G—lived in Chelsea and so could easily call at his home during an afternoon journey with the horse ambulance, and, securing the latter by fastening the reins to the garden gate, run indoors for tea what time “His Majesty's transport” waited patiently outside!

On one occasion G—, who, with a somewhat officious staff-sergeant, was riding one and leading two other enormous cart

THE TRANSPORT AND SOME OTHERS.

horses down Queen Victoria Street, became so exasperated by the frequent admonitions of the N.C.O. in question to keep well into the side of the road that, unable to stand it any longer, he lowered himself from his mount, and before the astonished and dismayed staff-sergeant could realise what was happening, had jumped on a passing motor-'bus and gone home, leaving his three charges to the care of the already over-burdened nagging one. History does not record how *he* got home!

On the whole, the H.T.'s had an easy time in England, but, arrived in France, their duties became decidedly more arduous. In addition to the actual care of their horses, journeys had to be made daily in all weathers and along any and every kind of road (or lack of road) to the divisional dump for rations and forage, not to mention frequent visits for coal, water, medical and canteen stores and sundry other necessary supplies. The horse ambulances were frequently used for conveying sick, while in stunts, particularly on the Somme, they were constantly employed for evacuating wounded, often at great risk to drivers and horses, the size of the vehicles and their slow rate of progress (necessitated by the extreme roughness of the ground) rendering them particularly liable to be caught by the salvoes of shells with which the Germans periodically peppered the tracks.

On the occasion of moves, too, the transport's lot was by no means always a happy one. The weather often seemed to take a malicious pleasure in giving of its worst at such times, and two or three days' "trekking" along the roads of northern France in an incessant downpour was not calculated to improve the spirits of either men or horses. The drivers grumbled hard—who in the army did not grumble?—but they carried on, then and throughout those three years in France, and the Company never had cause to complain that "the transport let us down."

Motor ambulances did not form part of the unit's equipment in England, and it was not until we arrived at Airaines that

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our first M.T. section joined us. These stayed with the ambulance until the Somme, when, to the general regret, Sergeant Hook and his merry little band were detached to another convoy. Their places were taken by a new section who, joining at La Gorgue, remained with us until after the Armistice. We of the Company were inclined sometimes to envy the M.T.'s their "soft job," but it was not all honey by any means, as the casualties sustained (and the honours awarded them) clearly prove. During stunts they had many narrow escapes while evacuating wounded along heavily shelled roads. Two cars were actually destroyed by shell fire on the Arras-Cambrai road, though fortunately no lives were lost on that occasion, and most of the others bore marks of frequent "warm" quarters-of-an-hour.

Another section of the unit, the omission of any reference to whom would be ungrateful indeed, was the Sanitary Squad. Theirs was at all times an unpleasant task, but it was invariably performed ably and with a good will, and it can justly be said that what Corporal Hathaway and his henchmen did not know about incinerators and the disposal of refuse was not worth knowing.

Then there were the cooks, with "Steve" (Sergeant Stephens) at their head, ably seconded by the imperturbable "Sammy" (Corporal Fawcett). Theirs, too, was a thankless task, more often than not performed under anything but favourable conditions, particularly, for example, when a move was in progress. At such times the cooks had to be among the last to strike camp and the first to unpack at the other end, where they were expected to have fires burning, water boiling, and all in readiness for ministering to the needs of hungry and thirsty troops arriving after a long and wearying march. That the cooks never lost their tempers or that foreign bodies were never discovered in the dixies would be a record of perfection to which even "Steve" himself would not lay claim, but at least it can be said that everyone seemed to thrive

THE TRANSPORT AND SOME OTHERS.

on the fare which our Maconochie purveyors provided, and certainly no one ever needed to remain hungry long, which is the best tribute that can be paid to the cooks' skill in overcoming the many difficulties with which they had to contend.

Of such an august and skilled body as the workshop staff one hardly dares to speak. Wratten, Thirtle, Norman Cook and others built and dismantled camps, repaired wagons, painted limbers and did a hundred and one other jobs as skilfully as the conjurer produces the rabbit from the hat and with far less material up their sleeves with which to work, and at their head "Uncle" Best was a prince among cajolers when just five minutes more was needed to ensure the completion of a job. Even the most hardened "lead-swingers" could not resist an appeal from "Uncle."

The butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker—in other words the Orderly Room staff, the postman, the unit orderly, the barber, the bootmaker—they all deserve mention, but space forbids more, and "Finis" must be put to this rambling screed. . . . Stop! we had almost forgotten Percy Prebble and his water-cart. The minute degree of perfection to which P.L.P. had brought the art of chlorination of water and the other duties (*and privileges!*) of a water-cart orderly. . . . Well!

THE END.

Roll of Honour

*They shall not grow old as we that are left grow old ;
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn ;
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.*

BURWOOD, H. W.
COX, A. A.
DALY, P. W.
DEWEY, T. A.
EASTMAN, L. F.
EGERTON, C. V.
FAIRWEATHER, E. A.
FARROW, A. E.
HIELD, E. J.
HOCKING, L. H.
ILOTT, H. J.
JEVONS, W. L.
NEWTON, F. C.

PERRY, F. A.
QUIRK, R.
RANSLEY, F. J.
ROBERTSON, R. V. R.
SIMPSON, Capt. F.
SKINNER, P. G.
TANTER, W. L.
TOMLINSON, W. H.
(M.T.A.S.C.).
TWEED, C. W.
WEEKS, R. A.
WELLINGTON, C.
(M.T.A.S.C.).

Honours and Awards

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE ORDER.

Lieut.-Col. C. S. Brebner.

MILITARY CROSS.

Major D. G. Rice-Oxley. Capt. G. N. Braham.

DISTINGUISHED CONDUCT MEDAL.

Pte. H. J. Siphthorp.

MILITARY MEDAL.

Sergt.-Major F. A. Smith	Pte. W. Grimshaw
Staff-Sergt. J. W. A. Billam	(M.T.A.S.C.)
Staff-Sergt. S. R. Sargent	Pte. E. J. Hield
Cpl. H. R. Hathaway	Pte. A. Hodgkinson
L./Cpl. V. E. Mossman	Pte. F. Hook
L./Cpl. H. D. Watts	Pte. D. A. Johns
Pte. S. Bailey	Pte. R. Kinloch
Driver W. D. Cameron	Pte. A. G. Lee
(H.T.A.S.C.)	Pte. A. Morgan
Pte. F. Cassidy	Pte. H. H. Rainger
Pte. H. L. Chase	(M.T.A.S.C.)
Pte. N. R. Cook	Pte. A. G. Schofield
Driver J. Day (H.T.A.S.C.)	Pte. A. H. J. Tipper
Pte. W. Fenton (M.T.A.S.C.)	Pte. C. F. White
Pte. J. Godbold	Pte. H. P. Wright.

MERITORIOUS SERVICE MEDAL.

Sergt. A. E. Bennett	L./Cpl. F. W. Charman
Sergt. H. E. Hewitt	Pte. E. J. Meiklejohn
Cpl. B. A. Rutton (M.T.A.S.C.)	

CROIX DE GUERRE (*Belgian*).

Sergt. B. P. Hale.

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MÉDAILLE DES EPIDÉMIES (*French*).

Sergt.-Major F. A. Smith.

MENTIONED IN DISPATCHES.

Lieut.-Col. C. S. Brebner (twice).

Major D. G. Rice-Oxley.

Staff-Sergt. J. W. A. Billam.

L./Cpl. E. L. Wratten.

Divisional "Cards of Merit" were also awarded to various members of the unit in recognition of exceptional service.

AGRAM

the movements of

THE
ELD AMBVLANCE

London Division

1916 to November 1918

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